

# Tips for Nurses: Myths about morphine



**What it is:** Opioids are analgesics. They are medications often used to treat pain related to terminal illnesses.

Morphine is an opioid analgesic that offers safe and effective relief of moderate to severe pain. There are other opioids. Myths are widely believed but untrue beliefs.

**Why it matters:** Morphine is often the preferred opioid analgesic in palliative care unless contraindicated. However, there are many myths about morphine that may affect its acceptance for treatment of pain.

Nursing staff often administer medications and can provide older people and their families with information to reassure them.

**What I need to know:** Wrong information may affect:

- willingness to accept morphine for pain
- the family's understanding of why morphine is being prescribed
- a nurse's readiness to administer morphine.

Begin the conversation by asking 'What do you understand about morphine?' or 'Do you have any queries about morphine?'

**Myth** Once on morphine the end is near.

**Fact** Morphine properly used does not cause death, the underlying illness does.

**Myth** Enduring pain will enhance one's character.

**Fact** Pain decreases quality of life and causes suffering.

**Myth** Morphine is addictive.

**Fact** When given at the right dose to relieve pain, morphine is not addictive.

**Myth** Injections are better than oral.

**Fact** Oral preparations are as effective as injections; long-acting forms mean better pain control and less frequent administration.

**Myth** Side effects (nausea, vomiting, constipation, sleepiness etc.) are due to allergies.

**Fact** Allergies to morphine are rare, side effects can be managed and should be reported to the prescriber.

**Myth** Tolerance to morphine will develop and higher doses will be needed.

**Fact** Tolerance develops slowly. Disease progression may cause increasing pain and increased need for analgesia.

**Myth** Morphine is a treatment for cancer.

**Fact** No, morphine is not a treatment for cancer. It is an analgesic medication used to relieve the symptoms of pain.

**Name:**

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## My reflections:

Have I ever had to address family member concerns about the use of morphine or other opioids for an older person?

What information might be helpful for family members?

## My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice  
Tip Sheets:  
Opioid analgesics  
Pain management

For references and the latest version of all the Tip Sheets visit  
[www.palliaged.com.au](http://www.palliaged.com.au)