

Anticipatory medicines

Information for patients, family and friends

This sheet answers common questions about anticipatory medicines. If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your nurse or doctor. Please include a friend or family member in this discussion if it helps you.

What are anticipatory medicines?

Anticipatory medicines are a small supply of medicines for you to keep at home in case you need them. Your doctor or nurse may arrange a supply of these medicines for you. The medicines will come with paper forms, called medicine administration charts, which help your doctor or nurse to give them to you as needed in addition to your usual medicine.

Why do I need them?

You may not need anticipatory medicines right now, but they have been prescribed for you because your doctor or nurse thinks that they may be needed at some point in the coming days or weeks. Sometimes it can be difficult to get these medicines in time, especially at night or at weekends, so it is helpful to have them ready in your home.

Anticipatory medicines are usually injections, and may include medication for:

- pain
- nausea and/or sickness
- breathlessness or reducing secretions in the throat or chest that may cause noisy breathing
- anxiety or restlessness

The medicines that you are given will be tailored to your needs and will depend on your condition. Your doctor or nurse will explain this to you. You may not need all or any of the medications that are prescribed.

How are these medicines given?

Anticipatory medicines can only be given by a doctor or nurse. You cannot give yourself these medicines, nor can a friend or family member (in exceptional circumstances we may train a family member, but this is rare). You will be referred to the district nurses, who will provide you with a nursing folder which should be kept with the medication, and which will include the medicine administration charts that the nurses will use to record what they have given. This is to make sure your treatment is effective and safe.

Are there any side effects with anticipatory medicines?

All medicines can have side effects and it can take a few days to adjust to any new medicines. The possible side effects with these medicines will vary depending on your condition and other medicines you may be taking, but may include drowsiness, feeling of

sickness, a dry mouth and constipation. If you need any of these medicines, your doctor or nurse will discuss the possible side effects with you and look at ways to help prevent them.

How do I take them?

These medicines are prescribed as injections, in case you can't take your usual medication by mouth. If you can take medicines by mouth and wish to continue this, it may be possible to offer some medicines as tablets or liquids instead. Your doctor or nurse can discuss this with you.

Can I continue to take my other medication?

It can be helpful to see if any of your other medicines can be stopped without causing a problem, especially if you find it difficult to take things by mouth. It may be important to continue with some medicines taken by mouth, patch or injection. Other medications may need to be adjusted (for example, medicines for epilepsy, diabetes or heart rhythm should be checked with your doctor). Your doctor or nurse will discuss this with you.

How do I store these medicines?

As with any medicine follow these important safety steps:

- Store your medicine in the original box and at room temperature.
- Store your medicines in a safe, secure place - out of the sight and reach of children.
- Tell at least one close family member or friend where these medicines are stored so they can be found when needed.
- Do not share your medicines with anyone else, they have been prescribed only for you.
- Take care of the paper forms that come with these medicines as your nurse or doctor will need this information to give the medicines to you.

What if I need more medicines?

Your district nurse will arrange to get a prescription from your doctor for more supplies. It is best to do this before supplies run out. If you notice supplies are running low, please let your nurse know as this will be helpful. The nurses are unable to collect medication from the community pharmacy. A friend or family member will need to be available to collect the medication or the community pharmacy may be able to deliver to you at home.

If you are admitted to hospital or another care setting, the medicines can go with you as they have been prescribed for you. It is useful for others to know what you have been prescribed and have available for use.

What should I do with my medicine if it is no longer needed?

Anticipatory medicines that are no longer needed should be taken back to your local community pharmacy. Try and do this as soon as possible. It does not have to be the same community pharmacy that the medicines were from originally. The nurses are unable to return medication to the community pharmacy. A friend or family member will need to do this on your behalf.

Who can I speak to if I have more questions?

If you have any questions about your anticipatory medicines, please talk to your GP, specialist palliative care nurse, your community nurse or other health care professional.

Acknowledgement

The information contained in this leaflet has been adapted from the 'Policy for the use of a Pan-London Symptom Control Medication Authorisation and Administration Record (MAAR) Chart for subcutaneous and intramuscular medication in the community setting' (May 2020).

More information

For more information about the palliative care service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: <https://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/palliative-care/>

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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