

## Pethidine for pain relief

Pethidine is used to treat pain, particularly during childbirth.

It is usually given by injection and provides pain relief for up to four hours.

The most common side-effects are feeling dizzy or sleepy, sweating and feeling sick (nausea).

### About pethidine

Type of medicine	A strong opioid painkiller
Used for	Pain relief
Also called	Meperidine (in US)
Available as	Tablets and injection

**Strong opioids** are medicines used to treat severe pain. Although there are a number of strong opioids, pethidine is the opioid that has been traditionally used during **childbirth**, as its effects are shorter-lasting than some of the others. It works on your nervous system and brain to reduce the amount of pain you feel. Pethidine can be taken by mouth as a tablet, but during labour it is more usually given as an injection.

### Before having pethidine

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine may only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before you are given pethidine, it is important that your doctor knows:

- If you are pregnant (other than during labour) or breastfeeding.
- If you have liver or kidney problems.
- If you have prostate problems or any difficulties passing urine.
- If you have any breathing problems, such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- If you have been told you have low blood pressure (hypotension).
- If you have any problems with your thyroid or adrenal glands.
- If you have epilepsy.
- If you have a problem with your bile duct.
- If you have been constipated for more than a week or have an inflammatory bowel problem.
- If you have a condition causing muscle weakness, called myasthenia gravis.
- If you have recently had a severe head injury.
- If you have ever been dependent on drugs or alcohol.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.

## How pethidine is given

- Before you start the treatment, ask to read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack. It will give you more information about pethidine and will provide you with a full list of the side-effects which you may experience from having it.

- If you have been prescribed **pethidine injection**, this will be given to you by your doctor or nurse. It will be injected under your skin or into a muscle. The injections can be repeated every few hours during labour, if needed. If you are being given pethidine for other types of pain (such as after an operation), the injection can be repeated every four hours.
- If you have been prescribed **pethidine tablets**, take the tablets exactly as your doctor has told you to. The usual dose of pethidine is between one and three tablets. The dose should not be repeated more frequently than every four hours. If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember and then continue taking your doses every four hours from that point. Do not take two doses together to make up for a forgotten dose.

## Getting the most from your treatment

- Ask your doctor for advice before drinking alcohol. Your doctor may recommend that you do not drink alcohol for a while after you have had pethidine because it increases the possibility of side-effects such as feeling dizzy and sleepy.
- If you are a driver, please be aware that pethidine is likely to affect your reactions and ability to drive. It is an offence to drive while your reactions are impaired. Even if your driving ability is not impaired, should you drive, you are advised to carry with you some evidence that the medicine has been prescribed for you - a repeat prescription form or a patient information leaflet from the pack is generally considered suitable.
- If you are planning a trip abroad and need to take pethidine with you, you are advised to carry a letter with you from your doctor to explain why you have been prescribed it. This is because pethidine is classed as a 'controlled drug' and is subject to certain restrictions.
- You will not be given pethidine tablets for longer than is necessary. This is because repeatedly using pethidine over a period of time can lead to your body becoming dependent on it. When you then stop taking it, it will cause withdrawal symptoms such as restlessness and irritability. If you are concerned about this, discuss it with your doctor or pharmacist. This will not become a problem if you are receiving a dose or two of pethidine during labour.

## Can pethidine cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects although not everyone experiences them. The table below contains some of the most common ones associated with pethidine. You will find a full list in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with your medicine. The unwanted effects often improve as your body adjusts to the new medicine, but speak with your doctor or pharmacist if any of the following continue or become troublesome.

<b>Common pethidine side-effects</b>	<b>What can I do if I experience this?</b>
Feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting)	Stick to simple foods. Drink plenty of water to replace any lost fluids
Feeling dizzy, sleepy or drowsy	If this happens, do not drive and do not use tools or machines. Do not drink alcohol
Other common side-effects include headache, dry mouth, constipation, feeling flushed, itchy skin rash, sweating, feeling confused, difficulties passing urine, shallow breathing	If any of these occur, speak with your doctor

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the medicine, speak with your doctor or pharmacist.

## How to store pethidine

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.

# Important information about all medicines

Never take more than the prescribed dose. If you suspect that you or someone else might have taken an overdose of this medicine, go to the accident and emergency department of your local hospital. Take the container with you, even if it is empty.

This medicine is for you. Never give it to other people even if their condition appears to be the same as yours.

If you are having an operation or any dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

If you buy any medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are suitable to take with your other medicines.

Do not keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your pharmacist.

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

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## Further reading

- [Manufacturer's PIL, Pethidine 50 mg/ml and 100 mg/2 ml Solution for Injection](#); Martindale Pharma, an Ethypharm Group Company, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated March 2021.
- [Manufacturer's PIL, Pethidine Tablets BP 50 mg](#); Martindale Pharma, an Ethypharm Group Company, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated December 2020.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 88th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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