

## Supportive care

# Abstral® SL tablets

## Introduction

Abstral® is used to treat breakthrough pain (a temporary flare in pain) related to cancer. The possible benefits of treatment vary; your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment.

This should be read in conjunction with the manufacturer's patient information leaflet.

## What is Abstral®?

Abstral® is a tablet which contains a drug called fentanyl, a strong opioid painkiller. As it is absorbed quickly it has the potential advantage of providing rapid pain relief. You will only be prescribed Abstral® if you are already prescribed a regular strong opioid painkiller (e.g. morphine, fentanyl, and oxycodone).

## How do I take Abstral®?

Abstral® should be administered by placing the tablet underneath the tongue. This is called 'sublingual' administration. The tablets should not be swallowed but allowed to dissolve completely without chewing or sucking. If your mouth is dry, you may use water to moisten your mouth prior to taking Abstral® to allow the tablet to dissolve. You should not eat or drink until the tablet has completely dissolved.

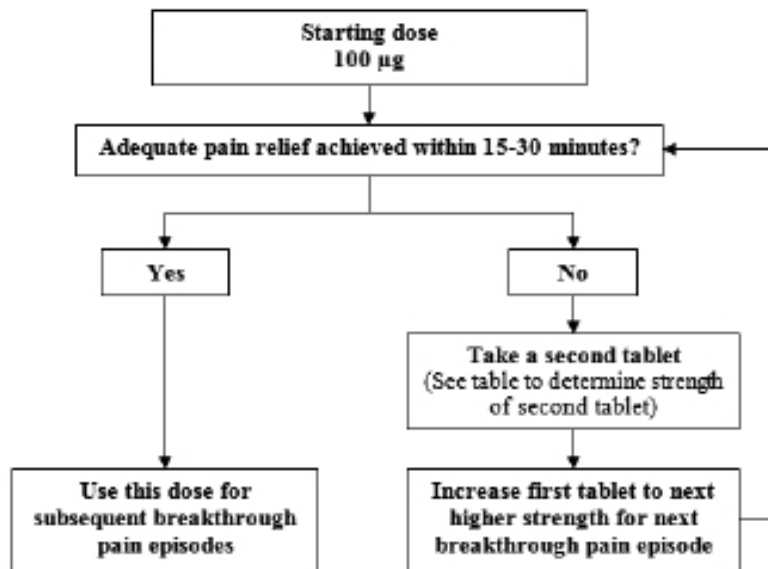
## What dose of Abstral® is usually prescribed?

The starting dose is 100 micrograms of Abstral® which will be adjusted as required for each breakthrough pain episode. The effects vary from person to person and the dose is increased based on how effective it is at managing your pain. If adequate pain relief is achieved within 15-30 minutes you remain on 100 micrograms of Abstral®. If not, the dose would be increased as described in the table overleaf. The prescribing doctor will talk this process through with you and ensure prescription of the required strengths.

You can take up to 4 doses of Abstral® in a 24 hour period. Occasionally, this may differ but the maximum number of doses will be agreed between you and the healthcare professional managing your pain. You must leave at least 2 hours between doses.



ABSTRAL TITRATION PROCESS



Strength (micrograms) of first sublingual tablet per episode of breakthrough pain	Strength (micrograms) of supplemental (second) sublingual tablet to be taken 15-30 minutes after first tablet, if required
100	100
200	100
300	100
400	200
600	200
800	-

### Can I take Abstral® with my other medications?

All of your medications will be reviewed when you are prescribed Abstral® and you will be advised as to whether you will continue with any medication that you have previously been prescribed for pain.

Abstral® may interact with some medications, including certain antifungal drugs such as fluconazole, and the antibiotics clarithromycin and erythromycin. You should also avoid grapefruit juice whilst you are prescribed this medicine.

Use of Abstral® and sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs increases the risk of drowsiness, and difficulties in breathing (respiratory depression). If you are taking any sedative medicines, you will be carefully monitored for side-effects.

If you have any queries or concerns about Abstral® and other medicines you are taking, you can discuss with your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist. Further information is available in the manufacturer's patient information leaflet which is supplied with the medication.

## What are the possible risks/side-effects?

Tiredness or sleepiness may occur. Other side-effects may include sickness, constipation and confusion. In overdose, please seek medical attention urgently because Abstral® can slow your breathing pattern. If this is not treated, it can be potentially fatal.

## Is Abstral® addictive?

Most patients do not suffer from addiction when Abstral® is started appropriately and its effectiveness reviewed. However, there have been some reports of addiction to these fentanyl preparations. Risk of addiction is lower when the medication is used appropriately in a clinical setting. Please discuss this with your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist if you would like further information.

## What is the length of treatment and plan for follow up?

The length of treatment will depend on your symptoms. You will be regularly reviewed to assess whether the Abstral® needs to continue or the dose needs to be altered. We will agree together who will continue to review your pain. You will be either reviewed by The Christie supportive care team or a local service if this is available.

## Do I need to have any tests or special monitoring when taking Abstral®?

There are no routine tests required. The healthcare professional managing your pain will want to ensure that your blood tests have been checked prior to starting treatment to ensure there are no issues with your kidney and liver function.

## Can I drive if I am taking Abstral®?

Abstral may impair your mental and/or physical ability to perform potentially hazardous tasks such as driving or operating machinery. It may be an offence to drive if your ability to drive safely is affected by taking this medicine. You should not drive after starting Abstral® or after a dose change until you have had a discussion with your doctor regarding whether this is advisable and safe.

## Can I drink alcohol?

Abstral® can make you feel sleepy, and alcohol will add to this. We advise that you avoid alcohol. If you would like any further information about this please discuss this with your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist.

## Who will initiate Abstral® and issue further prescriptions?

Abstral® will be initiated by the supportive care team. It will be agreed between the supportive care team and your GP or other local service who will issue further prescriptions.

## How do I get further prescriptions for Abstral®?

Abstral® is a specialist medicine in palliative care and is not readily available from your community pharmacy; who require advance notice to order.

If your GP is willing to prescribe Abstral®, **please don't leave it too late to request a prescription.** You should request a prescription at least 72 hours in advance of you running out of medication to give your GP and community pharmacist time to arrange. Please allow extra time at weekends and bank holidays.

If you are attending The Christie supportive care or pain clinic for follow up, Abstral® may be dispensed by The Christie Pharmacy. You should be given sufficient supply to last you until your next review.

**If you run out of Abstral® and are unable to get a further supply, you must contact the supportive care team for advice.**

## How should Abstral® be stored?

When taken as directed and under medical supervision, Abstral® is safe for you. However, it is dangerous and potentially fatal if taken by those it is not prescribed for. Please keep the tablets in their original packaging out of the reach of children or anyone else who might take them inadvertently, and if they are consumed seek urgent medical attention. Any unused medication can be returned to any pharmacy for safe disposal.

## Who should I phone if I need advice urgently about Abstral®?

Monday to Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm contact the supportive care team on **0161 446 3559**, or **0161 446 8493**.

During the evening or at weekends and bank holidays, if you have any queries, contact The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**.

## Useful contacts

Secretary: supportive care team	<b>0161 446 3559</b>
Secretary: pain team	<b>0161 446 8493</b>
Supportive care pharmacist	<b>0161 446 3443</b>
The Christie Pharmacy	<b>0161 446 3432 / 3433</b>

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **[the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net)**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week