



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Pain Relievers

also known as painkillers
or analgesics

Different types of pain relieving medicines are available for treating different types of pain. Pharmacists and doctors can advise you on the best pain relievers for your pain.

When an area of the body is damaged or stressed in some way, nerves from the affected area carry a message to the brain, which we call pain. Pain is an unpleasant sensation that may be mild or severe, sharp or dull and acute or chronic.

Acute pain

Acute pain is pain that comes on suddenly and lasts for a limited time period. It may be mild or severe and may last a few minutes, hours, days or weeks. Examples of acute pain include insect bites, headaches, burns and broken bones.

Chronic pain

When pain lasts for longer than three months, it is classed as chronic pain. It may be due to a chronic medical condition (e.g., arthritis or cancer), but sometimes the cause isn't known. Occasionally, chronic pain may be due to an accident, infection or surgery that damages a nerve. This type of nerve pain is called neuropathic pain.

Using pain relievers

There are a number of different types of pain relieving medicines that work in different ways and suit different types of pain. The effectiveness of pain relieving medicines depends on a number of things including:

- Matching the type of pain reliever to the type of pain
- The form of pain reliever used. Some pain relievers are available in a variety of different forms including soluble tablets, immediate-release tablets, slow-release tablets, mixtures, injections, creams, gels and patches
- How often the pain reliever is used – it is sometimes better to use pain relievers regularly, rather than on an 'as needed' basis. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice on the best way to use pain relievers

- A person's age, medical condition(s) and other medicines – which may influence which type, form and dose of pain reliever is most suitable for them. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Non-prescription pain relievers

Paracetamol

- Relieves mild to moderate pain (e.g., headache, muscle and joint pain, sciatica).
- Reduces fever.
- Is suitable for all ages.
- Is suitable for people who are sensitive to aspirin or other NSAIDs (e.g., children, people with stomach or kidney problems, some people with asthma).
- The risk of side effects is low compared to other pain relievers.

Paracetamol is available as tablets, capsules, mixtures and suppositories.

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs include aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen and diclofenac. They:

- Relieve mild to moderate pain, including period pain
- Reduce inflammation (e.g., sprains, arthritis)
- Reduce fever.

NSAIDs are available as tablets, capsules and mixtures and as creams and gels for topical use.

All NSAIDs may cause serious side effects. Check with a pharmacist or doctor before using NSAIDs if you:

- Are sensitive to aspirin
- Have asthma, high blood pressure, heart failure, kidney problems, gastrointestinal problems or reflux

- Are pregnant or trying to become pregnant
- Are taking medicines to reduce blood clotting
- Have recently had or will be having surgery or dental work.

Stop taking NSAIDs and consult a doctor if you develop swollen ankles, breathing problems, black faeces or coffee-coloured vomit.

Note: Aspirin should not be used by children under 16 years, unless advised by a doctor.

Codeine

Codeine is available in combination with aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol. Codeine:

- May give stronger pain relief, but it is not effective for everyone
- Is not recommended for relief of migraine
- May cause drowsiness
- May cause constipation
- If used incorrectly can cause dependence and withdrawal symptoms.

Combination products

Some products contain paracetamol, codeine or an NSAID in combination with other medicines (e.g., cold and flu products, some migraine products).

A range of different products may contain the same pain reliever. Always check the ingredients of combination products, to avoid double dosing of pain relievers.

Important

Always ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice about the best pain relieving medicine for your pain and how to use it effectively. Incorrect use of pain relievers can be harmful.

- High doses or prolonged use of certain pain relievers can lead to serious kidney, liver or gastrointestinal damage.
- Regular use of certain pain relievers can cause physical and psychological dependence.
- Some pain relievers interact with other medicines.
- Prolonged and frequent use of pain relievers for headaches may cause medication overuse headache.
- Aspirin may cause a serious adverse reaction in children. It should not be used by children under 16 years unless advised by a doctor.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

Prescription pain relievers

Higher doses of pain relievers and stronger pain relievers can be prescribed by a doctor for persistent pain, more severe pain or neuropathic pain.

Self care

- Check with a pharmacist or doctor if you need to use a pain reliever for more than three days in a row.
- Read all medicine labels and follow the directions.
- Do not exceed the recommended maximum dose of a pain reliever. Calculate children's doses by weight.
- Do not take pain relievers to continue working or playing sport when injured.
- Remember that pain can also be reduced by non-medicine means, (e.g., hot/cold packs, physiotherapy, TENS, relaxation, massage, exercise). Ask a doctor, pharmacist or physiotherapist for advice.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques to manage stress – especially if stress brings on pain such as headache.
- Alert your doctor, dentist and pharmacist if you are taking pain relievers regularly.

Related fact cards

- *Back Pain*
- *Constipation*
- *Gout*
- *Headache*
- *Migraine*
- *Osteoarthritis*
- *Period Problems*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Rheumatoid Arthritis*
- *Sprains and Strains*

For more information

HEALTHInsite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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Panadol®

Always read the label. For temporary relief of pain symptoms.
Use only as directed. Incorrect use could be harmful.
Consult your healthcare professional if symptoms persist.