

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, nerves from the affected area carry a message to the brain, which we call pain. Pain is an unpleasant sensation or feeling that may be mild or severe, sharp or dull and acute or chronic.

Acute pain

Acute pain is pain that starts suddenly and lasts for a short time. It may be mild or severe and may last a few minutes, hours, days or weeks. The cause of acute pain is usually known. Causes include bites, burns, headaches, broken bones and surgery.

Chronic pain

Chronic pain is pain that occurs on most days of the week for longer than 3 months. It can be due to a long-lasting medical condition (e.g. arthritis, cancer), or it can be pain that continues long after healing has occurred. Sometimes the cause of a person's chronic pain

cannot be found. Pain that continues after healing may be due to changes in the nervous system.

Medicines for pain relief

Pain-relieving medicines don't always stop all pain, but can reduce pain to a level that does not affect daily life. There are a number of different types of pain relievers that suit different types of pain. The choice of a pain reliever and how well it relieves the pain depend on a number of things including:

- a person's age, medical condition(s) and other medicines
- the type of pain, where it occurs and how strong it is
- the form of pain reliever.

Pain relievers are available in different forms including soluble tablets, immediate-release tablets, slow-release tablets, mixtures, injections, creams, gels and patches

- how often the pain reliever is used. Sometimes it is better to use pain relievers at regular intervals 'by the clock', rather than 'as needed'.

Non-prescription pain relievers

Paracetamol, anti-inflammatory pain relievers and codeine are pain-relieving medicines that do not need to be prescribed by a doctor. You can buy these non-prescription pain relievers, and also get advice about their use, from a pharmacy.

Paracetamol

Paracetamol:

- can relieve mild to moderate pain (e.g. headache, muscle and joint pain)
- can reduce fever
- is suitable for all ages
- has a low risk of side effects and other problems when used correctly.

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

Anti-inflammatory pain relievers (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs – NSAIDs)

Anti-inflammatory pain relievers include aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen and diclofenac. NSAIDs can:

- relieve mild to moderate pain
- reduce inflammation (e.g. gout, arthritis)
- reduce fever.

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

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

- are sensitive to aspirin
- are pregnant or trying to become pregnant
- have asthma, high blood pressure or heart, kidney, liver or gastro-intestinal problems
- take a medicine or have a medical condition that affects blood clotting
- take any other medicines
- have recently had or will be having surgery or dental work
- have a muscle or joint injury.

Always use the lowest dose of NSAIDs that relieves your symptoms. If you need to use NSAIDs for more than a few days, seek medical advice. Stop taking NSAIDs and seek medical advice if you have swollen ankles, breathing problems, unexplained bruising or bleeding, heartburn, black faeces or coffee-coloured vomit.

Codeine

Codeine is an opioid (morphine-like) pain reliever. Non-prescription pain relievers containing codeine can only be obtained from a pharmacist, who must approve and advise on their use.

Non-prescription codeine products contain codeine in combination with aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol. These codeine products:

- can give stronger pain relief than paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen alone. However, codeine is not suitable for everyone
- are not usually recommended for relief of migraine
- can cause nausea, drowsiness, dizziness, constipation, breathing problems and other side effects

- can impair driving ability
- can cause dependence and withdrawal symptoms if not used correctly.

Combination products

- Some products contain paracetamol or an NSAID combined with codeine and / or other medicines (e.g. cold and flu products, some migraine products). Always check the ingredients of combination products, in order to avoid taking an overdose of pain relievers.
- Some paracetamol products also contain caffeine, which may increase the pain-relieving effect of paracetamol. If you want to use these products, ask a pharmacist for advice before using other products containing caffeine (e.g. tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks, chocolate).

Prescription pain relievers

Higher doses of pain relievers, stronger pain relievers (e.g. opioids) and medicines for nerve pain (neuropathic pain) can be prescribed by a doctor.

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 take more than the recommended dose of a pain reliever. Give children the correct dose for their age and weight, according to the instructions on the label.
- Do not take pain relievers to

continue working or playing sport when injured.

- Avoid alcohol when you are using an opioid (e.g. codeine).
- Remember that pain can also be reduced by non-medicine means (e.g. hot/cold packs, physiotherapy, TENS, relaxation, massage, exercise, correct posture). Ask a doctor, pharmacist or physiotherapist for advice.
- Learn and use 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.

Important

Always ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice about the best pain reliever for your pain, and about the best way to use it. Using pain relievers the wrong way can be harmful.

- High doses or constant use of some pain relievers can lead to serious kidney, liver or gastro-intestinal damage.
- Regular use of codeine and other opioid pain relievers can cause physical and psychological dependence (addiction).
- Some pain relievers interact with other medicines.
- Repeated use of pain relievers for headaches can cause medication overuse headache.
- Aspirin may cause serious side effects in children. It should not be used by children under 16 years of age unless advised by a doctor.

For more information

Australian Pain Management Association

Pain Link telephone helpline: 1300 340 357
Website: www.painmanagement.org.au

Chronic Pain Australia

Website: www.chronicpainaustria.org.au

Painaustralia

Website: www.painaustralia.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222
Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

NPS MedicineWise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)
Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

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

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