

# Pain relief at home

Information for adult patients



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## Introduction to pain relief

This leaflet explains how to take your pain relief medicines to ensure you are as comfortable as possible after you leave hospital. It has been written by patients, patient representatives, pharmacists and anaesthetists working in partnership.

Remember:

- Everybody feels pain differently and some people need more pain relief than others.
- You should take your pain relief medicines as soon as you have any pain and before it gets too bad. It is easier to relieve pain if it is dealt with early.
- If you have had an operation, it is important that the pain caused by the operation is well controlled, as this will help your recovery.

## Different levels of pain

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Level 0</b><br><b>No pain</b><br>'comfortable' | <b>Level 1</b><br><b>Mild pain</b><br>'ache, niggle,<br>uncomfortable' | <b>Level 2</b><br><b>Moderate pain</b><br>'painful, sore,<br>really hurts' | <b>Level 3</b><br><b>Severe Pain</b><br>'worst pain<br>you've ever had' |
|---|--|--|---|

It is important that you manage your pain effectively to ensure the best recovery for you. We hope this leaflet goes some way to help you do this.

## Common pain relief medicines and their side effects

Always read the information leaflet provided inside the medication boxes. If you have any questions about your medicines, you can ask your local pharmacist (chemist) or your GP.

There are three main groups of pain relief medicines:

### **Paracetamol**

- Very few side effects
- Maximum dose is two 500mg tablets (1g), four times a day
- Do not take more than eight tablets per day
- Leave a gap of four to six hours between doses
- Do not take with anything else containing paracetamol, such as cold and flu treatments, co-codamol, or co-dydramol, as this will result in taking more than the recommended maximum daily dose of paracetamol.

### **Anti-inflammatory medicines**

- Examples include ibuprofen (Nurofen®), diclofenac (Voltarol®), naproxen, meloxicam, indometacin and piroxicam
- Do not take more than one anti-inflammatory medicine at any time. Check with your local pharmacist or GP if you think you might already be taking an anti-inflammatory medicine which is not listed above
- Doses vary – please follow the directions on the label or the box
- May cause indigestion and should be taken with or after food
- All anti-inflammatory medicines should be avoided by people with stomach ulcers, kidney problems or severe asthma
- Diclofenac (Voltarol®) should be avoided by people who have or have had heart disease, stroke or problems with their circulation
- If you have been given one of these medicines and you are concerned that you may have one of the conditions listed, please talk to your local pharmacist or GP before taking the tablets.

### **Opioid (codeine-based) medicines**

- Dihydrocodeine, codeine phosphate, tramadol
- Do not take with anything else containing opioids, such as co-codamol, co-dydramol, morphine, fentanyl and buprenorphine
- Doses vary – please follow the directions on the label or the box
- Do not take more than eight per day
- Leave at least four hours between doses
- Side effects may include:
  - constipation – which can sometimes be avoided by drinking plenty of fluids and increasing your intake of dietary fibre
  - drowsiness – if you feel drowsy do not drive or operate machinery
  - nausea/sickness – may be avoided by taking these medicines with food
- Alcohol should be avoided with these medicines.

## **More information about pain relief medicines**

### **How to decide which pain relief medicine to take**

The medicine you take will depend on your level of pain. Please see page four to find out if you should avoid any of the different types of pain relief medicines.

Start by taking **paracetamol**. This is a very effective pain reliever with few side effects. It may take up to half an hour to work. To get the best effect, paracetamol should be taken regularly (four times a day) as described on the box or label.

### **Taking more than one pain relief medicine**

#### **“I have taken paracetamol regularly but I still have pain – what should I do?”**

If your pain is more than mild you should take an anti-inflammatory pain relief medicine together with your paracetamol. Please see page four to check that this type of medicine is suitable for you. You should take these regularly as instructed on the box until your pain is only mild in nature. At this stage you can then reduce the number you are taking each day until you are just on paracetamol again.

#### **“I have taken paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medicines but I still have pain’ or ‘I cannot take anti-inflammatory medicines’ – what should I do?”**

You may have been given a opioid (codeine-based) pain relief medicine by the hospital, such as dihydrocodeine, codeine or tramadol.

You should take these as instructed on the label. Whether you take one or two tablets, and how often you do so, will depend on your level of pain.

No matter how many you take you should still continue to take your other pain relief medicines such as paracetamol regularly and if possible, your anti-inflammatory as these will enhance the pain-relieving effects of the codeine-based medicines.

## **Taking more than one pain relief medicine at the same time**

It is possible to take one medicine from each of the three groups at the same time, for example paracetamol, ibuprofen and dihydrocodeine can be used together at the recommended doses. Please see page four to find out if you should avoid any of the different types of pain relief medicines.

Do not take more than one medicine from each group. For example, do not take ibuprofen and diclofenac, or dihydrocodeine and tramadol together.

## **What to do if you still have pain**

If you feel sure you have reached the maximum dose of your medicines but are still in pain you should seek medical advice. You may have been given a contact number to call by the hospital. If not, you should contact your GP, local walk-in centre or emergency department, depending on how bad your pain feels. They will be able to identify if there is a problem that has caused you to experience a pain level that is higher than expected for your condition.

## **How to stop pain relief medicines**

If you have been taking a combination of paracetamol, anti-inflammatory and codeine-based medicines regularly, it can sometimes be confusing to know how to stop them. Do not stop all of them suddenly as your pain may come back and it will then be harder to get back under control.

You should keep taking paracetamol regularly while you gradually stop the codeine-based medicine first, and then the anti-inflammatory (if you were able to take this type of medicine).

Pain can feel worse at night, when there is less to distract you from the feeling. If this is the case, stop the day-time doses first and continue to take pain relief medicines at night until you feel ready to stop these doses.

## **What to do with left-over pain relief medicines**

Never give your prescribed tablets to other people, as they may not be safe for them to take. You can take left-over medicines to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

## **Pain relief after an operation**

An operation will inevitably result in some pain but you should always try to minimise the amount of pain your body is feeling as this helps to reduce the stresses on the body. You can do this by using your pain relief medicines effectively. This will encourage healing of your body, enable you to recover more quickly from your operation and ensure a quicker return to a normal level of activity.

## **Pain relief on the day of your operation**

What you receive on the day of your operation will depend on the type of operation you are having and will be decided after discussion between you and your anaesthetist.

## **Pain relief to take home**

If your operation was planned in advance, the pre-assessment clinic staff will have asked you to stock up on pain relief medicines for use at home after your operation. When you are ready to go home, the hospital will give you a supply of any stronger pain relief medicines you might need to take home with you.

If your operation was unplanned, you will be given a supply of pain relief medicines to take home with you.

If you are already taking any pain relief medicines please let your anaesthetist know. You should also let them know if you have any allergies or if you are unable to take any specific pain relief medicines.

## Contact us

If you have any questions about your pain relief medicines, please contact medicines information on **023 8079 6908**.

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**If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688 for help.**

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