

## Paracetamol

Paracetamol is a good general pain management medication. It is used to help manage lots of different types of chronic pain.

The usual dose for paracetamol is 1-2 tablets (500-1000mg) four times a day. You should not take more than 2 tablets at a time. A gap of at least 4 hours should be left between doses. A maximum of 8 tablets (4000mg or 4g) should be taken in a 24 hour period.

Paracetamol is available in different formulations such as tablets, caplets, capsules, soluble tablets and liquids. They usually contain 500mg of paracetamol.

Caplets are tablets shaped like a capsule. They can be useful where people find the tablets hard to swallow. The soluble tablets contain a high amount of salt. The liquid is mostly used for children.

## The importance of taking regular paracetamol

Sometimes people believe they need something 'stronger' than paracetamol. What they may need to do is take more regular doses of paracetamol rather than one-off doses.

Spreading the doses of the paracetamol evenly out over a day will help your pain the most. For most people this will mean only taking tablets when they are awake.

- 2 paracetamol 500mg tablets every 4-6 hours. This could be taken at 8am, 1pm, 6pm and 10pm

Some people prefer to keep a dose in case they wake during the night and need help with their pain.

- 2 paracetamol 500mg tablets every 4-6 hours. This could be taken at 8am, 2pm, 8pm and 2 tablets at some point during the night

## Side effects and safety

Paracetamol is nearly free from side effects. All patients are different, some may have mild side effects but this is unusual. Paracetamol is

a safe medication if taken as prescribed. It is dangerous to take more paracetamol than recommended and it can cause damage to your liver.

If you have problems with your liver or drink a lot of alcohol you should talk to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about this before taking paracetamol or other tablets with paracetamol in them.

If you weigh less than 50kg (around 7 <sup>1/2</sup> stone) then you may need a reduced dose. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about this.

Some cough and cold preparation also contain paracetamol. Be careful not to take these medications at the same time, as this may cause you to take too much paracetamol.

## Combining standard paracetamol tablets with other paracetamol containing products:

Paracetamol can be used with stronger pain management medications (analgesics) to get more pain relief. It can be taken as a single tablet with both medicines in it. To show the combination of medications the name starts with co-.

### Co-codamol 30/500

Contains 500mg paracetamol and 30mg codeine per tablet.

### Co-dydramol 20/500

Contains 500mg paracetamol and 20mg dihydrocodeine per tablet.

A prescription is required for these strengths. Lower strengths of these medication combinations can be bought from pharmacies for short term use only.

**Remember** each co-codamol or co-dydramol tablets contains the equivalent of 500mg of paracetamol. You should take no more than 8 paracetamol containing tablets or capsules (4000mg or 4g of paracetamol) in 24 hours.

## Medication in chronic pain

The benefit from taking medication should always be more than any side effects you may have. Only **you**

- know how bad your pain is
- are able to say if your medicine is helping
- know what side effects you are having

It may take a few weeks or several trials of different medications to find the best combination for you and your pain. It may help to keep a diary of your pain and other symptoms. Side effects often become less once you have been on a medicine for a few days.

Please read the patient information sheet given with each medication. It gives more information about the medicine and any side effects.

You can discuss your pain medication with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist. They can give you advice on which pain medicines may help. They can help you find the best way to take your medicines. They can advise you on putting your dose up safely if your pain is worse and on taking less medication safely when your pain is less.

If your medicine is not helping you may not need to take it. Please talk to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist first. Some pain medicines should not be stopped suddenly.

Do not share or take other peoples medication. Always advise your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about any other medication or products you are taking for chronic pain. This includes anything bought from the pharmacy, herbal supplements or non- prescribed medicines.

**Understanding how your medications work may help you to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects.**

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## Patient Information Leaflet



GETTING YOU ON TRACK TO RECOVERY

NHS Fife provides accessible communication in a variety of formats including for people who are speakers of community languages, who require Easy Read versions, who speak BSL, read Braille or use Audio formats.

NHS Fife SMS text service number 07805800005 is available for people who have a hearing or speech impairment.

To find out more about accessible formats contact:  
[fife-UHB.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.net](mailto:fife-UHB.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.net) or phone 01592 729130