

This resource has been retired (January 2025)

This resource has been retired and is no longer considered an AWMSG-endorsed resource.

The resource underwent an assessment for review in June 2024. At that time members of the All Wales Prescribing Advisory Group (AWPAG) considered it appropriate to retire the resource.

The content contained within the resource was considered to be out of date and, without an indication that an updated version of the resource would be of significant benefit to NHS Wales, AWPAG members considered it most appropriate for the resource to be retired at this time.

If you think this resource should be reconsidered for review, please get in touch with AWTTTC by emailing AWTTTC@wales.nhs.uk.

Always read the label and the leaflet inside the box. Make sure you know exactly what the medicine contains and what it is for. Many pain-relieving products are unsuitable for children, the elderly, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers.

Other than medicines, how else can I manage mild to moderate pain?

The following may help you manage your pain:

- Application of heat/cold packs to the site of pain
- Gently increasing activity and exercise
- Pacing your activity
- Appropriate footwear
- Support aids e.g. walking stick
- Physical therapies such as physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic treatments
- Weight management
- TENS machine (ask your pharmacist for more information)

Are there any other resources I can use for advice?

The Pain Toolkit (www.thepaintoolkit.org)

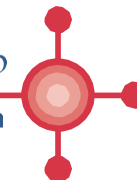
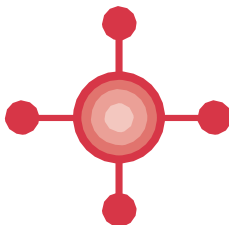
The Back Book (www.tsoshop.co.uk)

Arthritis Care (www.arthritiscare.org.uk)

Education Programmes for Patients (www.eppwales.org)

NHS Clinical Knowledge Summary – Analgesia – mild to moderate pain (www.cks.nhs.uk)

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Medicines for mild to moderate pain relief *Over the counter and on prescription*

There is a wide range of pain relief medicines available, either from your doctor or over the counter at a pharmacy. Some pain relief medicines can also be purchased in general stores.

If in doubt, speak to your pharmacist or doctor.

What medicines are available? Do they have any side effects?

Note: Listed are the main “active ingredients” of the medicines; brand-name medicines often contain additives, such as caffeine, which have not been proven to provide pain relief.

Paracetamol

Paracetamol is useful for mild to moderate pain. At the dose recommended on the box (2 tablets, 4 times a day for adults), paracetamol is very safe. It has few side effects and can be taken regularly in the long term. For persistent pain, it is more effective if used regularly.

Never exceed the recommended dose; overdose can cause severe liver damage and death. Regular use of combinations such as paracetamol and caffeine can cause daily headaches.

Anti-inflammatories (non-steroidal)

Ibuprofen and naproxen are non-steroidal anti-inflammatories that can be bought over the counter. *If appropriate*, your doctor may prescribe other medicines within this group (examples are diclofenac, indomethacin, etodolac, meloxicam, celecoxib and etoricoxib).

These medicines are commonly used for **muscular aches**; they can also help relieve **dental pain** and **period pain** (dysmenorrhoea). Your doctor may prescribe them for **mild to moderate pain**, especially where there is **inflammation**. The long-term use of these medicines can be associated with problems such as:

- Indigestion and potentially stomach ulcers
- Worsening of kidney function
- Worsening of high blood pressure and symptoms of heart failure
- Small risk of stroke or heart attack
- Interference with some prescribed medicines, especially warfarin and some blood pressure tablets

Therefore, anti-inflammatories should normally only be taken for **short periods of time**. If you feel you need to take them on a regular basis, this should be under the supervision of a doctor. Your doctor may need to review your medicines every six months to make sure you still need to take them and that they are not doing you any harm. Many patients tend to only use anti-inflammatories on their “bad days”.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories are also available as **gels/creams**. These may provide some relief for joint or muscle pain when rubbed gently only into the affected area. **Always use the correct amount, as directed on the instruction leaflet**. You must make sure you avoid your face and eyes, and ensure you wash your hands after use. These gels and creams can cause the same problems as listed above, so should also be used with caution.

Codeine with paracetamol

This may work better than paracetamol alone. Low dose codeine with paracetamol is available over the counter at a pharmacy. However, codeine **can cause side effects** such as nausea, vomiting, dizziness and drowsiness. **If you become drowsy or dizzy, do not drive or use machines**. The most common side effect of codeine is constipation. You may therefore need to adjust your diet and/or drink more fluids. The pharmacist or your doctor may advise you to take laxatives if you get constipated. Regular use of combinations such as paracetamol and codeine can cause daily headaches.

Your doctor may prescribe a bigger dose of codeine, **often combined with paracetamol**. This will also be associated with the range of codeine side effects described above. In addition, there is a risk of becoming **dependent** if codeine-containing medicines are taken long-term.

Can I take anti-inflammatories and paracetamol together?

Paracetamol and paracetamol/codeine combinations can be taken at the same time as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (e.g. ibuprofen and naproxen).

If you are taking a mixture of plain paracetamol and paracetamol/codeine combinations, however, **make sure you do not exceed a total of 8 tablets in a 24-hour period**.

Many cough and cold remedies include paracetamol; always check the label. If unsure, speak to a pharmacist.