

Managing your pain after birth – how to use over-the-counter painkillers

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about taking over-the-counter (OTC) painkillers to treat your pain after birth.

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What are over-the-counter (OTC) painkillers?

OTC painkillers are also known as analgesics and can be used to manage your pain after you have been discharged from hospital.

Unfortunately, St George's doesn't prescribe these for you to take home, but you can buy them cheaply without a prescription over the counter from a pharmacy, chemist or supermarket.

Who should take pain killers?

It is of course up to you as an individual, but if you've had a Caesarean section, instrumental birth with ventouse or forceps, normal delivery or stitches we would normally recommend taking painkillers regularly for a few days.

What pain killers should I take?

We recommend **paracetamol** and **ibuprofen**, which are safe if you are breastfeeding.

You can buy generic, unbranded paracetamol and ibuprofen or branded products such as Panadol (paracetamol) or Nurofen (ibuprofen).

All these products work in exactly the same way and have the same active ingredients, but branded products are usually more expensive than unbranded.

Can I take other over the counter painkillers?

Paracetamol and ibuprofen are also found in combination with other medicines in other OTC pain or cold and flu remedies, such as Solpadeine, Nurofen Plus, Beechams and co-codamol, a combination of paracetamol and codeine.

You should not take these combination medicines - only take paracetamol and ibuprofen, unless you have discussed other analgesia with your midwife or doctor.

How do I take the medicine?

Always read the label on the packaging so you know what it contains. Take the dose according to the instructions on the packaging, and don't exceed the recommended dose:

- Paracetamol 500mg tablets – take two tablets up to four times daily.
The maximum recommended dose is eight tablets or 4 grams in 24 hours.
- Ibuprofen 200mg tablets – take two tablets up to three times daily.
The maximum recommended dose is six tablets or 1.2 grams in 24 hours.

You can take either paracetamol, or Ibuprofen, or if you need more pain relief you can use both. You can also alternate between doses of both if you feel you don't need them at the same time.

Are there any side effects?

Side effects from both drugs are very rare.

Paracetamol is a very safe drug, but if you take more than the recommended daily dose there is a risk of severe liver damage which could be permanent.

Ibuprofen should always be taken with food as it can irritate the lining of the stomach. Do not take if you have or have ever had a stomach ulcer, perforation or bleeding caused by Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). Do not take if you are allergic to Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) or Aspirin. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist before taking ibuprofen if you have asthma.

Is there anything else I need to know?

- Take the minimum number of tablets you need to control your pain.
- If you are taking the maximum dose of both paracetamol and ibuprofen and are still in pain, contact your community midwife or GP for advice.
- Keep a record of the medicines you are taking to help remember how much you have taken each day.

Always keep your medicines out of the reach of children.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please contact our medicines information line on 020 8672 1255 extension 1033 (Monday to Friday, 11am to 3pm). Out of hours, please leave your contact details on the answerphone and you will be contacted the next working day.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

