

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.

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 killers 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 that you know what it contains. Take the dose according to the instructions on the packaging and don't exceed the recommended dose as follows:

- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
 - Body weight over 50kg take two tablets up to four times daily.
The maximum recommended dose is eight tablets or 4 grams in 24 hours.
 - Body weight up to 50kg take one tablet up to four times daily
The maximum recommended dose is four tablets or 2 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 this if you have or have ever had a stomach ulcer, perforation or bleeding caused by Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). Do not take it if you are allergic to 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, 11.00am to 3.00pm). Out of hours, please leave your contact details on the answering machine 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 advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

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

NHS UK

The NHS 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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

