

Paracetamol in Combination painkillers (analgesics)

- Paracetamol is often used with stronger painkillers (analgesics) to get more pain relief.
- Paracetamol is commonly mixed with codeine. This can be as two tablets or as a single tablet containing both drugs (co-codamol). Co-codamol is available in three strengths. Some of these need a prescription.
- Paracetamol can also be mixed with dihydrocodeine. This can be as two tablets or as a single table containing both drugs (co-dydramol). Co-dydramol is available in four strengths. Some of these need a prescription.
- It is important not to take more than the daily safe amount of paracetamol. The usual dose for paracetamol is 1-2 tablets (500-1000mg) four times a day.
- **This is a maximum of 8 tablets (4000mg or 4g) in 24hours.**
- If your weight is less than 50kg, you should only take 1 tablet (500mg) four times a day.
- **This is a maximum of 4 tablets (2000mg or 2g) in 24 hours if you weigh less than 50kg.**
- Don't forget medicines that you buy from the supermarket or pharmacy may also contain paracetamol, so you should always check the ingredients.

Codeine & Dihydrocodeine

Codeine & dihydrocodeine belong to a group of painkillers called 'weak opioid' analgesics. These drugs are part of the opium family. They originally come from a part of poppy seeds and calling them 'weak opioids' can be confusing. These are strong pain killers.

In your brain, they work on how your body sends pain signals. They are good at making you relaxed. This can be helpful in helping the stress that often comes with pain.

Are there any side effects?

These tablets can cause side effects. Not everyone will get them. The common ones are feelings of sickness, constipation or sleepiness.

These effects may make people decide to stop taking their medicines. The side effects may get less with time and can be helped in other ways. A short course of laxatives can help with constipation. If you are breastfeeding, pregnant or likely to become pregnant you should let your GP or pain specialist know.

Types of Medication Available

Codeine Products

Codeine Products	Amount of Paracetamol per tablet	Amount of Codeine per tablet	Also known as	Retail / Legal Status
Paracetamol 500mg	500mg	none		Available to buy in shops & Pharmacies
Cocodamol 8/500	500mg	8mg		Available to buy in Pharmacies
Cocodamol 15/500	500mg	15mg	Codipar®	Prescription only
Cocodamol 30/500	500mg	30mg	Solpadol® Tylex® Kapake®	Prescription only

Dihydrocodeine Products

Dihydrocodeine Products	Amount of Paracetamol per tablet	Amount of Dihydrocodeine per tablet	Also known as	Retail / Legal Status
Paracetamol 500mg	500mg	none		Available to buy in shops & Pharmacies
Co-dydramol 7.46/500	500mg	7.46mg	Paramol®	Available to buy in Pharmacies
Co-dydramol 10/500	500mg	10mg		Prescription only
Co-dydramol 20/500	500mg	20mg	Remedeine®	Prescription only
Co-dydramol 30/500	500mg	30mg	Remedeine Forte®	Prescription only

Combining standard Paracetamol with Combination painkillers (see table attached)

By using a mix of standard paracetamol and co-codamol or co-dydramol, you can change the amount of opioid (codeine or dihydrocodeine) you are taking.

This will change with your pain levels.

Example table for combining standard Paracetamol with Combination painkillers

Approx timings	7-8am	12-1pm	5-6pm	10-11pm
Pain controlled by paracetamol alone	2 paracetamol 500mg	2 paracetamol 500mg	2 paracetamol 500mg	2 paracetamol 500mg
Pain slightly worse add opioids e.g. codeine	2 co-codamol or 2 co-dydramol	2 paracetamol	2 paracetamol	2 co-codamol or 2 co-dydramol
	or			
	1 paracetamol + 1 co-codamol	1 paracetamol + 1 co-codamol	1 paracetamol + 1 co-codamol	1 paracetamol + 1 co-codamol
	or			
	1 paracetamol + 1 co-codamol	2 paracetamol	2 paracetamol	2 co-codamol or 2 co-dydramol
or				
Any combination of the above as long as you don't exceed the equivalent of 8x paracetamol (4000mg in 24hrs), or 4 if you weigh less than 50kg.				

The important thing to remember is, each co-codamol or co-dydramol tablet has the same amount of paracetamol as one ordinary paracetamol tablet or caplet.

You can take both kinds of tablets, if no more than a total of 8 tablets or caplets containing paracetamol (4000mg or 4g) are taken per day. If you weigh less than 50kg, you should not take more than a total of 4 tablets per day.

Taking both kinds of tablets can give you better control of your pain. It can also help to reduce or manage side effects. The attached table gives examples of how to take your medication.

How you could begin to reduce your Co-codamol.

It is important not to stop taking Co-codamol suddenly as this can sometimes cause withdrawal symptoms for a few days. It is best to begin reducing your Co-codamol slowly and then you are unlikely to get withdrawal symptoms.

It is important to choose a time to begin reducing your medication. This should be when you do not have stresses in your life and when your pain is stable.

Only you know when your pain tends to be worse. It would be best to reduce the first dose at a time of day when your pain is usually at its best.

The table below gives you an idea of how you could begin to reduce your Co-codamol.

Week	Morning	Lunch time	Teatime	Night
Week 1	2 co-codamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	2 co-codamol	2 co-codamol
Week 2	2 co-codamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	2 co-codamol
Week 3	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	2 co-codamol
Week 4	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol
Week 5	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	2 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol	1 co-codamol + 1 paracetamol

You can continue to reduce your Co-codamol further in this way by a tablet each week. You may need to reduce more slowly than this or may be able to reduce every few days depending on how you feel. If you have any worries whilst reducing your medication you can discuss this with your GP or pain specialist.

Taking medication in chronic pain relief

- The benefits gained 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 or is giving you problems with side effects.
- If your medicine is not helping you may not need to take it, but please talk to your doctor or pharmacist first. Remember that it may be several days or weeks before you notice that a new medicine is making a difference.
- Getting the best effect from your medication may be a matter of trial and error. 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.
- You can discuss your pain medication with your GP, pharmacist or pain specialist. They can give you advice on which painkillers may help and they can help you find the best way to take your medicines.
- You will find more information about your treatment in the product information leaflet.

If you understand how your treatment works you will be able to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects.

Adapted from the Fife Integrated Pain Management Service for use within Greater Glasgow and Clyde