

# Pain relief for children – paracetamol and ibuprofen

English



Pain is common in many injuries and illnesses in children, as well as after having an operation (post-operative pain). Your child may need pain-reliever medicine (analgesic), such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, to help reduce or control their pain.

Paracetamol and ibuprofen do not treat the cause of your child's pain; both medicines just relieve the feelings of the pain.

It is important to give the correct dose of pain-relieving medicine. Give the dose that is written on the bottle or packaging according to your child's weight.

Any infant or child who is unwell, or in moderate to severe pain, should be seen by a doctor to find out the cause.

## Signs that your child is in pain

Older children can often tell you that they have pain, although some children might not be able to tell you exactly where their pain is. Younger children may show you that they have pain by:

- crying or screaming
- pulling a face
- changes in their sleeping or eating patterns
- becoming quiet and withdrawn
- refusing to move, or being unable to get comfortable.

## Care at home

If you can't relieve your child's pain by comforting them and helping them to relax, distracting them or providing a cool compress, giving them pain-relieving medicines can help.

- **Paracetamol** can be used for mild to moderate pain in babies over one month old, children, adolescents and adults. However, if too much paracetamol is given to a child for too long, it may harm the child.
- **Ibuprofen** can be used for mild to moderate pain in children, adolescents and adults. It should not be used in children under three months of age, or be given to children with bleeding disorders.
- **Never give aspirin** for pain to your child if they are under 12 years, unless it is advised by your doctor. It can cause a rare but serious illness called Reyes Syndrome.

Paracetamol or ibuprofen can reduce your child's pain and help them feel more comfortable, but neither medicine will make the cause of the pain go away.

Paracetamol and ibuprofen can help your child sleep more easily if they have a painful condition, such as an ear infection, sore throat, sore stomach or a broken bone.

If your child's pain lasts for more than a few hours, the pain is moderate to severe, or your child is clearly unwell, take your child to a doctor to find out the cause.

Giving paracetamol	Giving ibuprofen
<p><b>How much to give:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paracetamol for children comes in several different strengths: for babies, for young children and for older children. Paracetamol is also produced and sold by many different companies, and different brands may have different names (e.g. Panadol, Panamax, Dymadon).</li> <li>• Always give the dose that is written on the bottle or packet according to your child's weight.</li> <li>• If your baby or child is taking any other medicine, check that the medicine does not also have paracetamol in it. Do not give more paracetamol if your child has had some in other medicine.</li> </ul> <p><b>How often can it be given?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paracetamol can be given every four to six hours – no more than four times in 24 hours.</li> <li>• If you need to give your child paracetamol for more than 48 hours, you should take them to see a doctor.</li> </ul>	<p><b>How much to give:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ibuprofen for children comes in several different strengths: for babies, for young children and for older children. Ibuprofen is also produced and sold by many different companies, and different brands may have different names (e.g. Nurofen, Brufen, Advil, Dimetapp).</li> <li>• Always give the dose that is written on the bottle or packet according to your child's weight.</li> </ul> <p><b>How often can it be given?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doses can be given every six to eight hours, but no more than three times a day.</li> <li>• There are some rare but serious side effects that might occur if ibuprofen is given to a child for a long time. If you need to give your child ibuprofen for more than 48 hours, you should take them to see a doctor.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Short-term use of ibuprofen, at appropriate doses, may be taken with a glass of water and no food. If this causes stomach upset, you should try offering your child some food or milk.</p>
<p><b>Giving your child both paracetamol and ibuprofen</b></p> <p>So that your child's pain is well controlled, it is OK to alternate giving paracetamol and ibuprofen, or even to give both at the same time. If you do this, it can be easy to accidentally give too much of either medicine. Keep a diary of when you give each dose of paracetamol and ibuprofen so you don't give your child too much of either medicine.</p>	

## Overdoses of pain-relieving medicine

- **Paracetamol** is one of the most common medicines taken by children in an accidental overdose. Swallowing a lot of paracetamol mixture or tablets could harm your child's liver, and sometimes their kidneys.
- If too much **ibuprofen** is taken, it can cause stomach upsets, or sometimes it can affect breathing and make a person very drowsy.

**If your child has had too much paracetamol or ibuprofen, call the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26 in Australia) or take them to the nearest hospital emergency department.**

To prevent your child finding and taking medicine:

- Always store medicines out of reach of children. It is best to keep them in a locked or child-proof cupboard.
- Do not take tablets out of their foil wrapping until you are ready to give or take the tablets. The wrapping is designed to be hard for children to open. Keeping the tablets wrapped will mean that a child may not be able to take as many if they find them.
- Always leave the child-resistant lid on a bottle of paracetamol or ibuprofen mixture.

## Key points to remember

- Give the dose that is written on the bottle or packaging according to your child's weight.
- Pain-relieving medicines do not treat the cause of your child's pain.
- Any baby or child who is unwell, or in moderate to severe pain, should be seen by a doctor to find out the cause of the pain.
- Do not give paracetamol or ibuprofen to your child for more than 48 hours without seeing a doctor.
- If your child has had too much paracetamol or ibuprofen, call the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26 in Australia) or take them to the nearest hospital emergency department.

## For more information

- Kids Health Info: [Fever in children](http://rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children) (rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\_sheets/Fever\_in\_children)
- The Royal Children's Hospital: [Comfort Kids](http://rch.org.au/comfortkids/for_parents) (rch.org.au/comfortkids/for\_parents)



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[rch.org.au/kidsinfo](http://rch.org.au/kidsinfo)

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