Over the counter painkillers

There are a number of painkillers that you can buy over the counter without a prescription to help control pain.

If your doctor has advised you to take painkillers then follow a stepwise approach - see below.

Paracetamol

- Paracetamol is a good first choice painkiller.
- It is a safe medicine and side-effects are rare.
- It can help other painkillers to work.
- It can be taken at the same time as other painkillers, as long as the other painkillers do not contain Paracetamol.
- The adult dose is 2 tablets up to 4 times a day. Wait 4 hours between doses. Do not take more than 8 tablets in 24 hours.

Anti-inflammatory painkillers

- Ibuprofen is an example of this type of medicine.
- Another name for this medicine that you may hear is NSAIDs.
- NSAIDs can be taken in addition to Paracetamol.
- It is best to take this medicine with a meal, as on its own it can irritate the stomach. For this reason, you should see your GP if you need to take it for more than a few days so they can give you a medicine to protect your stomach.
- As you get older the side-effects from NSAIDs can become more of a problem, consider using Co-Codamol before NSAIDs or chat with your GP about the risks.

If you take Aspirin regularly, have had an allergic reaction in the past to Aspirin, or have ever had a peptic ulcer then tell your doctor or pharmacist before taking this medicine.
Co-Codamol

- Co-Codamol is available over the counter if pain is still a problem after following the steps above.
- Co-Codamol is a mixture of Paracetamol (500mg per tablet) and another painkiller called Codeine Phosphate (8mg per tablet).
- This medicine can be taken safely at the same time as NSAIDs. However, you should not take Paracetamol alongside Co-Codamol as this could result in you having higher than the recommended safe dose.
- This medicine may cause some side-effects. The most common are constipation and light headedness.
- The maximum adult dose is 2 tablets, 4 times a day (wait 4 hours between doses).

Codeine Phosphate

- Codeine Phosphate is available in higher doses than found in Co-Codamol.
- However, these higher doses are only available from your GP.
- Codeine Phosphate can be taken with either Paracetamol or NSAIDs or BOTH.
- This medicine may cause some side-effects. The most common are constipation and light-headedness.

It is important to take your painkillers regularly for a few days rather than just when you notice your pain. This will allow you to gain the maximum benefit from your painkillers.

Paracetamol + Ibuprofen

Paracetamol + Ibuprofen + Codeine

Paracetamol + Ibuprofen + Co-Codamol

Increasing pain

Always read the instructions when taking medicines bought over the counter, and seek help from a doctor or pharmacist before taking painkillers if you are taking any other regular medicines.

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