

Paracetamol

(Examples of brand names: Dymadon, Febridol, Panadol, Panamax, Duatrol, Panadol Osteo, Panadol Extend)

What is paracetamol?

Paracetamol is a common pain killer (analgesic) providing relief of pain and high temperatures within 30 minutes of taking a dose.

How is it used in arthritis?

Paracetamol is usually the first medicine doctors recommend for the relief of all types of musculoskeletal pain including arthritis.

When taken regularly, paracetamol may help to manage **severe pain** and can reduce the need for stronger pain medicines or Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs), which, if not monitored properly, can cause serious side effects. (You can find out about NSAIDs from the separate information sheet).

How is paracetamol taken?

Paracetamol is usually taken by mouth in tablet or capsule form. It is also available as liquids and rectal suppositories.

What is the dosage?

Paracetamol usually comes in a 500mg tablet or capsule. It is also available in slow release (SR) 665mg tablets. The usual dose for adults and children 12 years and older is two tablets.

How often should it be taken?

Paracetamol can be taken **when needed**, that is when you feel the pain, or it may be taken **regularly** to manage persistent pain. Regular dosing is recommended to treat the persistent pain that may be associated with arthritis.

It is usually taken every four to eight hours depending on the type of preparation.

The side effects of paracetamol are not increased if you take it regularly, provided you do not exceed the recommended maximum daily dose.

Always follow the instructions provided in the packaging unless otherwise directed by your doctor.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are uncertain about how often to take your medicine.

How long is the treatment continued?

Treatment with paracetamol can be for a short period or long term.

Are there any side effects?

Most people who take paracetamol at recommended doses do not have side effects. Paracetamol does not affect blood clotting, worsen asthma or affect the function of the kidneys. It also does not increase blood pressure or increase the risk of heart attacks.

Rare side effects:

- *Stomach pains* and *nausea* have been rarely reported.
- *Allergy* to paracetamol can occur very rarely with a variety of skin rashes.

Effects associated with overdose:

Paracetamol is very safe in recommended doses but, because of its wide availability in many different products, accidental overdoses can occur if precautions are not taken.

Severe damage to the liver and kidneys can occur when more than the recommended dose is taken.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

There is a limit to the amount of paracetamol that can be safely taken in a 24 hour period.

For otherwise healthy adults, the maximum daily dose is 4 grams per day (6-8 tablets, depending on the strength of the tablets). This may be less if you have severe liver problems.

Be aware that other medicines may contain paracetamol, including cold and flu preparations and other pain preparations.

Check the ingredients of such medicines before you take them. If you do take other medicines containing paracetamol. Be sure to consider these and not exceed the recommended total daily dose of paracetamol.

It is also important that you tell the doctor or pharmacist about any other medicines you are taking.

You MUST see your doctor as soon as possible or go to the nearest emergency department if you think you have taken too much paracetamol.

What other precautions are necessary?

Dose in liver disease:

- Paracetamol is broken down in the liver. It is therefore important that you tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have any liver problems, as the dose may need to be reduced.

Other medicines:

- Anticoagulants e.g. warfarin can be taken safely with paracetamol. If you are taking the maximum dose of paracetamol (4 grams a day) on a regular basis, more frequent monitoring of warfarin is required.
- Aspirin can be taken safely with paracetamol in the low doses used for preventing heart attack and stroke.
- It is safe to take paracetamol with antibiotics for an infection.
- It is generally safe to take paracetamol with NSAIDs. Check with your doctor if you are taking NSAIDs regularly.

Alcohol:

- Paracetamol can be used safely with a moderate intake of alcohol. However drinking more than four standard drinks on one occasion, even if infrequently, is strongly discouraged.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding:

- Paracetamol can be taken safely during pregnancy or during breastfeeding.

Tell your doctor about all medicines you are taking or plan to take. This includes over the counter or herbal/naturopathic medicines. You should also mention your treatment when you see other health professionals.

© Copyright Arthritis Australia 2007. Reviewed February 2010. **Source:** A full list of the references used to compile this sheet is available from your local Arthritis Office.

The Australian General Practice Network, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Practice Nurses Association, Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and Royal Australian College of General Practitioners contributed to the development of this information sheet. The Australian Government has provided funding to support this project.

The information in this sheet has been obtained from various sources and has been reviewed by the Australian Rheumatology Association (ARA). It is intended as an educational aid and does not cover all possible uses, actions, precautions, side effects, or interactions of the medicines mentioned. This information is not intended as medical advice for individual problems nor for making an individual assessment of the risks and benefits of taking a particular medicine. It can be reproduced in its entirety but cannot be altered without permission from the ARA.

The NHMRC publication: *How to present the evidence for consumers: preparation of consumer publications* (2000) was used as a guide in developing this publication.

Your local Arthritis Office has information, education and support for people with arthritis

Freecall 1800 011 041 www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

Disclaimer: This sheet is published by Arthritis Australia for information purposes only and should not be used in place of medical advice.