

Pain Management after Childbirth

Royal Hospital for Women

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This factsheet is available to help you understand:

- Different types of medication that you may be asked to take to help manage your pain
- Which pain relief medicine you may have been given to take home
- How to take those medicines and their common side effects

Everybody's experience of pain is different. The medicine you are asked to take will be just for you according to:

- The type of delivery you had (i.e. vaginal or caesarean)
- The amount of pain you are experiencing
- Whether or not you are taking other medicines

Whilst taking the pain relief medicines described in this leaflet, you should not take any other pain medicine unless you have had this explained by your midwife, family doctor/GP or obstetrician.

There are three common types of pain relieving medicines:

- Simple pain relief, e.g. paracetamol
- Anti-inflammatories, e.g. ibuprofen, diclofenac
- Opioids, e.g. tramadol, oxycodone

Using a mix of different pain medicines can provide better pain relief with lower doses, as well as reduce the likelihood and severity of common side effects. Pain medicines are usually given as a regular dose, with additional medicine when required, if you still have pain (known as "breakthrough pain").

A tick in the box indicates a medicine you have been asked to take.

Simple Pain Relief

- Paracetamol** (common brand names: *Panadol* or *Panamax*) is a mild pain relief medicine and is well-tolerated with few side effects when used in the right doses.

The recommended dose is 1g (i.e. two 500mg tablets or caplets) every six hours (four times a day). Do not take more than 8 tablets (= 4g paracetamol) in 24 hours.

While taking regular paracetamol, you should not take any other medicine (e.g. over-the-counter medicine) containing paracetamol, e.g. cold and flu tablets or other brands of paracetamol. Paracetamol is considered safe to take whilst breastfeeding.

Anti-Inflammatory Medication

Anti-inflammatory medicines help to reduce pain due to inflammation and swelling. You can take either diclofenac or ibuprofen, but not both at the same time. Although usually well-tolerated, they can cause indigestion, heartburn, reflux, diarrhoea or abdominal pain in some patients. In a small number of patients with asthma, they can increase wheeziness. Where possible, these medicines should be taken with or soon after food.

- Diclofenac** (common brand name: *Voltaren*) is a strong anti-inflammatory.

The recommended dose is 50mg (one tablet) every eight hours (three times a day).

- **Ibuprofen** (common brand names: *Nurofen, Advil* or *Brufen*) is another anti-inflammatory used as an alternative to diclofenac. It is slightly less potent, but milder on the stomach.

The recommended dose is 200mg-400mg (one-two tablets) every eight hours (three times a day).

Diclofenac and ibuprofen are considered safe to take whilst breastfeeding.

Opioids

Opioids are stronger pain relieving medicines used for moderate to severe pain. You are asked to take them when pain is not controlled with other medicines. Common side effects which may occur include dizziness, nausea and vomiting, confusion, constipation and drowsiness. Due to the sedating effect, it is not advisable to drink alcohol or drive a vehicle while taking any of these medicines if you experience these side effects. Laxatives may be required if you experience constipation.

- **Tramadol** (common brand names: *Zydol, Tramedo, Tramal*) is a moderate to strong pain medication.

The recommended dose is 50-100mg (one-two tablets) up to four times a day when required for moderate to severe pain.

- **Oxycodone** (common brand names: *Endone* or *OxyNorm*) is a strong pain medicine similar to morphine. Side effects are more common with this medicine, and therefore you are only asked to take it for short periods only or as required for breakthrough pain. If it is used for relief or breakthrough pain, regular pain medicine should be continued and oxycodone added to 'top-up' your pain relief when required.

The recommended dose is 5-10mg (one-two tablets or capsules) up to four times a day when required for severe pain.

Both Tramadol and Oxycodone are regarded as safe for use when breast feeding. However, if you are concerned that your baby is tired or not feeding well, please seek prompt medical advice.

Please be very careful when handling your baby if you are taking Tramadol or Oxycodone. The sedating effects of these medications may increase your risk of falling or allowing your baby to roll out of your arms should you fall asleep. You should not co-sleep with your baby if you are taking these medications.

How Long Will I Need To Take Pain Relief Medicines For?

Everyone is different but we would expect you need:

- Simple pain relief (e.g. paracetamol) for 1-2 days for a vaginal delivery and 4-5 days for a caesarean delivery
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (e.g. diclofenac or ibuprofen) for 1-2 days for a vaginal delivery and 2-4 days for a caesarean delivery
- Opioid pain relief (e.g. tramadol or oxycodone) for 2-3 days for a caesarean delivery

If you are still in pain after this time please seek advice from your GP, family doctor or obstetrician.

Mothersafe

MotherSafe is a free telephone service for the women of NSW, based at the Royal Hospital for Women, Randwick. MotherSafe provides a comprehensive counselling service for women and their healthcare providers concerned about exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Phone: 02 9382 6539.



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