Using painkillers safely

A practical adult guide



Check the active ingredient, strength, dose interval and daily limit. Different brands may contain the same medicine.

Paracetamol

- Follow the packet or your prescription. Do not combine products containing paracetamol, including some cold-and-flu remedies.
- Ask about a suitable dose if you weigh under 50 kg, have liver or kidney disease, drink heavily, or take warfarin. Do not use an adult plan for a child.
- If you take more than the recommended amount, obtain urgent medical advice even if you feel well. Liver injury can be delayed. Take the packets with you.

Anti-inflammatory medicines

- Ibuprofen, naproxen and diclofenac are NSAIDs. Do not take two NSAIDs together or add them to aspirin without checking with a clinician.
- Ask before use if you have a stomach ulcer, bleeding history, kidney or heart disease, asthma, dehydration, pregnancy, or take a blood thinner.
- Use only the recommended dose for the recommended time. Food does not remove the risk of stomach bleeding or kidney problems.

Check before adding anything

- Tell your pharmacist all medicines and supplements you take. Do not stop prescribed low-dose aspirin or other long-term treatment yourself.
- Persistent, worsening or unexplained pain needs review. More medicine is not always the answer.

Get urgent help

Vomiting blood, black tar-like stools or severe stomach pain needs urgent assessment. Call 112 for collapse, trouble breathing or swelling of the tongue or throat. Suspected overdose needs immediate advice, even without symptoms.

My safe pain-relief plan

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Write the time of each dose if you might forget or more than one person helps with medicines.

Keep medicines in their labelled packaging and out of children's reach.

Medicine name / active ingredient

Strength and formulation

Amount per dose

Minimum time between doses / daily maximum

How many days to use it

Medicines to avoid / review date

Questions or notes for my appointment

Sources and further reading

NHS: paracetamol for adults
https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/paracetamol-for-adults/

NHS: ibuprofen for adults
https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/ibuprofen-for-adults/

NHS: NSAIDs
https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/nsaids/

General information. Follow your individual clinical plan. Sources checked 31 October 2026; review due October 2027.