

# Pain relief after birth

**This leaflet offers advice on suitable pain relief to use following the birth of your baby. If you have any queries or concerns, please speak to a doctor or your midwife.**

## Introduction

Many women take some form of pain relief for a few days after the birth of their baby. In hospital, the midwives will offer you pain relief at least four times each day. You may need painkillers on top of the regular doses. There are several types of tablets that we suggest that you use. If you have:

- **A little pain:** take paracetamol alone. You can take two paracetamol tablets every four hours, but must not take more than eight in 24 hours.
- **A bit more pain:** take two paracetamol tablets every six hours with one or two ibuprofen tablets. These can be taken at the same time and do not need to be staggered. Or, if you cannot take ibuprofen, take dihydrocodeine (see below).
- **If you require more:** also take one Dihydrocodeine tablet, in addition to the paracetamol and/or ibuprofen. You can take these every 4 to 6 hours (no more than 6 per day). You may wish to stagger these so that you take them between the doses of the other medicines.
- **There are other combinations of medicines that we can use if this does not suit you.**

By taking painkillers regularly your pain should not build up. This should mean that you will be able to move about more easily. Women with good pain relief recover more quickly and go home earlier. These pain-relieving tablet combinations are very safe when you take them as recommended. They are widely used in many maternity units and are safe to use if you are breastfeeding.

Paracetamol and ibuprofen can be bought without a prescription from a chemist or even at your local supermarket. **Policy at the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is that these tablets are not supplied for you to take home with you.** We suggest that you obtain a supply before your baby is born.

## Explanations of drugs and doses

- **Paracetamol tablets 500mg:** these are the simplest and safest painkillers. Most people have them in their homes for headaches. Up to eight tablets (a total of 4000mg) can be taken each day. Paracetamol is an extremely safe drug for almost everyone. However, if more than eight tablets are taken in any 24-hour period it can cause liver damage. It is very important that you check whether any other tablets or medications you are taking contain any paracetamol.
- **Ibuprofen tablets 200mg:** this is also known as Brufen or Nurofen. You may also have this at home as it can be bought 'over the counter' without a prescription. It should not be taken

while you are pregnant. It can cause stomach upsets or make wheeziness worse in a few people with asthma. Sometimes, we do not use it if your blood pressure has been very high, and would advise you against using it if felt appropriate. You can take 2 tablets (400mg) up to four times a day as long as you are eating food.

The tablets listed below are safe and effective, but if your baby becomes more and more sleepy over two or three days, you should seek advice from your doctor and stop taking these painkillers:

- **Dihydrocodeine tablets 30mg:** This is seen as a stronger painkiller. It commonly makes you constipated and it can also make you feel a bit sick or sleepy. Some people may find that it makes them very sleepy. If you are breastfeeding it may make your baby more sleepy. If you need some to take home, you will be given a prescription to get them from a chemist along with some laxatives to help reduce constipation. Please read our information leaflet: '[Pain relief when breastfeeding](#)'
- **Tramadol tablets 50 mg:** This is similar strength to dihydrocodeine. It can also make you feel a bit sick, sleepy and/or constipated but some people find that it suits them better than codeine. If you need some to take home, you will be given a prescription to get them from a chemist.
- **Morphine:** This is a very strong painkiller that can be given as a liquid to drink or by injection. We may use it in hospital if you need stronger pain relief. Morphine can make you feel sick or drowsy. If you have too much it can cause your breathing to be reduced. It can also make you constipated. However, it is a very good painkiller and some women will need it, particularly if they have had a Caesarean birth.

Constipation is very common after giving birth and can be made worse by several of these medicines. It is important to drink enough water and to eat high fibre food.

If you have any worries or questions, please ask your midwife, obstetric doctor or GP.

## Further information

Visit [www.oaa-anaes.ac.uk](http://www.oaa-anaes.ac.uk) for more information provided by The Obstetric Anaesthetist Association.

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Dr L Williams, Consultant Anaesthetist, January 2006

Reviewed: July 2021

Next review due: July 2023