

Pain relief after birth

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

Introduction

After birth many find that regular pain management is needed. In hospital, the midwives will offer you pain relief at least four times each day if required. You may need additional pain management on top of the regular doses. There are several types of tablets which can help 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, which is available by prescription only (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 six per day). You may wish to stagger these so that you take them between the doses of paracetamol and ibuprofen.
- There are other combinations of medicines that we can use if these do not work for you.

By taking painkillers regularly your pain should not build up. This should mean that you will be able to move about more easily. With good pain management you will 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. **Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust do not supply painkillers for you to take home with you.** We suggest that you buy a few packets 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 by the brand name 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 some people with asthma. Sometimes, we do not use it if your blood pressure has been very high, and in this case may advise you against using. You can take two 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*' which is available on the Trust website at www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/our-services/maternity/?showAllLeaflets=true&catlogue=services
- **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 management. 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 may need it, particularly if you 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 for more information provided by The Obstetric Anaesthetist Association.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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

George Gladstone, Consultant Anaesthetist, April 2026

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