

What is pain?

Pain is an unpleasant feeling usually brought on by injury, disease or infection. There can be other causes and sometimes there are no visible signs (such as a headache).

While most children with a minor injury respond to reassuring words, a hug or a Band Aid, a child's pain can serve as a useful warning of a potentially serious injury or illness.

The first step in managing any child's pain is to find out how much it hurts and where the pain is.

How to deal with a child's pain

The best way to find out how much pain your child has is to ask them and watch them. What does your child say about their pain? What is your child doing? How is their body reacting? Ask if they are okay or if they need something to make the pain better.

Look at the pattern of your child's pain and be aware of your child's behaviour and answers, which will tell you if they need help with their pain. Even very young children can say where their pain is and if it is a little pain or a big pain.

Pain is very distressing and if not treated can cause your child to become anxious.

If your child is in pain it is important to use medicines and also distractions such as blowing bubbles, slow breathing, music and stories. These will help your child cope.

If you are taking your child to the doctor, it is okay to give them a simple pain medicine such as paracetamol before you go. Your child does not need to be in pain for a medical examination.

Treatment

Medicines that relieve pain are known as analgesics. Some are available in supermarkets and some can be purchased in pharmacies without a doctor's prescription.

There are three main treatments available without prescription: paracetamol, ibuprofen and codeine. Always follow directions on the labels and never give more than the recommended dose, as this can cause serious side-effects.

Paracetamol, also known as Panadol®, Dymadon® and Panamax®, is suitable for mild pain. It is safe and effective when taken as directed on the label. Never give more than recommended.

Never guess the dose. Always read the label before measuring the dose and always use a proper measuring device.

Liquid paracetamol for children comes in different strengths for different ages so be sure to use the right dose for your child's age and weight.

Be careful not to give more than one medicine containing paracetamol. Some medicines for coughs, colds and sinus congestion include paracetamol. When paracetamol is in a medicine, it will be written on the label.

Ibuprofen, also known as Nurofen®, is an anti-inflammatory analgesic. It can be used as an additional pain medicine, especially if the pain is caused by swelling.

It must not be given to infants under six months of age.

Always give the right dose for your child's age and weight and use a proper measuring device.

Ibuprofen can cause side-effects such as feeling sick (nausea) and tummy (abdominal) pain. It is best taken with food.

Codeine is found in Panadeine® and Painstop® (in combination with paracetamol) and is stronger, designed for mild to moderate pain. It must not be given to children under the age of one year.

Side-effects can include drowsiness and constipation. Always give the right dose for your child's age and weight and use a proper measuring device.

As your child's pain improves, reduce the amount of codeine you give and increase the amount of time between doses.

A pain-management plan

Paracetamol

- Check dose on label and give every 4-6 hours regularly
- Maximum 4 doses per day

If pain not relieved by paracetamol add or change to >

Ibuprofen

- Check dose on label and give every 6-8 hours
- best to be given with food usually three doses per day

If pain not relieved continue ibuprofen but stop paracetamol and change to combination of >

Paracetamol and codeine

- Check dose on label and give every 4-6 hours
- Maximum 4 doses a day.

Safety

At home, always keep medicines in a safe place away from children.

Follow-up

If pain continues or is not helped by medicine please see your local doctor.

Notes:

Seeking help



In a **medical emergency** go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



See your local doctor or health care professional if:

- Pain medicines are not working
- You are becoming more worried
- Your child looks unwell
- Your child has a fever and rash
- Your child is drowsy or irritable
- Your child has difficulty walking.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to interpreting services for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- See your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the **Royal Children's Hospital** website www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo
- www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/anaes/Pain_go_away.pdf
- www.rch.org.au/pharmacy/media/medicinechildren.pdf

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