

# Hep C Factsheets

## Painkillers and the liver



### Introduction

### Paracetamol

### Aspirin

### Ibuprofen

### Codeine

### Summary

## Introduction

A common question that many people with hep C ask is whether over-the-counter pain killers (or analgesics) are harmful to the liver.

Generally speaking, when taken according to directions, the answer is no - but there are exceptions. People should always check with their doctor before taking 'over the counter' pain killers or other drugs.

## Paracetamol

Paracetamol is the safest analgesic for simple pain relief if you have hep C. However, if you drink alcohol to excess, or take medications that compete with paracetamol elimination, or haven't been able to eat for several days, you should not take more than two grams daily (four x 500 mg tablets). You should also stick to this daily dose if you take paracetamol on a regular basis (e.g. for arthritis).

Continued use over a long period can be harmful as paracetamol can cause acute liver damage especially in people with excessive alcohol intake or people with liver or kidney disease.

## Aspirin

Aspirin is used to relieve mild to moderate pain as well as treating fever. It also has an anti-inflammatory effect in that it reduces swelling and inflammation.

Adult dose: 1 to 3 tablets (300 to 900mg) every four hours when required up to a maximum of 12 tablets (3600mg) in 24 hours.

Aspirin can disrupt blood coagulation by increasing bleeding time. This effect continues after the aspirin has been stopped for approximately 4 to 7 days. Although there is no actual drug interaction between aspirin and interferon, both can disrupt blood coagulation processes and hence should be used with caution together.

Care is also needed when using aspirin in the later stages of liver disease if blood coagulation is abnormal.

Aspirin can cause liver injury especially in high doses - hepatotoxicity has occurred in doses higher than 2000 mg per day.

## Ibuprofen

Ibuprofen is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug used to treat pain, fever and inflammation.

Adult Dose: 1 to 2 tablets three to four times a day when required to a maximum of 1200 to 1800 mg per day.

As with aspirin, ibuprofen prolongs bleeding time and therefore should be used with caution in the later stages of liver disease and with people on interferon. This effect on blood coagulation is reversible and only lasts as long as the drug is circulating in the bloodstream.

Hepatotoxicity is a rare side effect of non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and can occur early on in treatment when ibuprofen is used regularly.

## Codeine

Codeine is available in combination with other medicines such as paracetamol. These are classified as restricted medicines and are only sold in pharmacies under the supervision of a pharmacist.

In people with liver impairment, the effects of codeine can be prolonged and hence caution is advised.

## Summary

Aspirin, codeine, ibuprofen and other non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs should only be used after consulting with your doctor.

Paracetamol is probably the safest pain killer for people with hepatitis. However, it should only be taken at normal dosages for short-term pain relief and not with large amounts of alcohol.

If you require pain medication other than something for the occasional headache etc, consult your doctor.

- This article is from the NZ Hep C Support Group newsletter *The Chronicle* (May/June 1998). Information came from the Medical Information Pharmacist at Auckland Hospital.

The article was subsequently reviewed by Dr Jacob George, Senior Lecturer in Hepatology, University of Sydney at Westmead Hospital.