

Codeine.

What is codeine?

Codeine is part of a group of drugs known as opioids. Opioids interact with opioid receptors in the brain and elicit a range of responses within the body, from feelings of pain relief, to relaxation, pleasure and contentment.¹

Codeine is used to provide relief from a number of conditions, including:

- mild to moderate pain
- severe pain (when combined with aspirin or paracetamol)
- dry irritating cough
- diarrhoea
- cold and flu (when combined with antihistamines and decongestants).¹

Some people misuse codeine by intentionally taking more than the recommended dose to get high, or as an act of self-harm.

Codeine is usually swallowed and comes in different forms, including:

- tablets
- capsules
- suppositories
- soluble powders and tablets
- liquids.¹

Other names

Codeine may also be known by a brand or trade name.

Some common examples are:

| Generic name | Brand names |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Aspirin and codeine | Aspalgin®, Codral Cold & Flu Original® |
| Ibuprofen and codeine | Nurofen Plus® |
| Paracetamol and codeine | Panadeine Forte®, Panamax Co® |
| Paracetamol, codeine and doxylamine | Mersyndol® and Mersyndol Forte®, Panalgesic® ¹ |

Effects of codeine?

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk – even medications can produce unwanted side effects. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Codeine affects everyone differently, based on:

- the person's size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken.

Side effects

The most common side effects of codeine are:

- dizziness
- tiredness
- confusion, difficulty concentrating
- euphoria, restlessness
- blurred vision
- dry mouth
- limbs feeling heavy or muscles feeling stiff
- sweating
- mild allergic rash, itching and hives
- decreased heart rate, palpitations
- stomach-ache, nausea, vomiting, constipation
- difficulty urinating.¹

These side effects may disappear with continued treatment, but if they persist, speak to a medical practitioner.

Overdose

If the dose is too high, you might overdose. If you experience any of the below symptoms, call an ambulance straight away by dialling triple zero (000).

- inability to pass urine
- severe constipation and obstructed bowel
- agitation
- cold clammy skin with a bluish tinge
- mental numbness
- very slow, shallow breathing
- hallucinations and sometimes seizures
- coma and death.¹

Long-term effects of codeine

Regular use of codeine may eventually cause:

- constipation
- reduced sex drive
- irregular periods
- tension and muscle twitches
- needing to use more to get the same effect
- dependence on codeine
- financial, work and social problems.^{1,2}

Discuss the side effects of long-term use with a medical practitioner.

Using codeine with other drugs

The effects of taking codeine with other drugs, including alcohol, prescription medications and other over-the-counter medicines, are often unpredictable.¹

Codeine taken with alcohol can cause mental clouding, reduced coordination and slow breathing.¹

Withdrawal

Giving up codeine after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Please seek advice from a medical professional.

Withdrawal symptoms usually start within a few hours after the last dose and become strongest between 48 and 72 hours.³

These symptoms can include:

- cravings for codeine
- dilated pupils
- abdominal cramps, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting
- lack of appetite
- runny nose and sneezing
- yawning and difficulty sleeping
- trembling, aching muscles and joints
- goosebumps, fever, chills, sweating
- restlessness, irritability, nervousness, depression.^{1,2}

Find out more about withdrawal at
adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/withdrawal/

Getting help

If your use of codeine is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situations, you can find help and support.

Help and support services directory:
adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory/

Information about treatment:
adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/treatment/

References

1. Upfal, J. (2006) The Australian Drug Guide (7th Ed.) Melbourne: Black Inc.
2. Brands, B., Sproule, B., & Marshman, J. (Eds.) (1998) Drugs & drug abuse (3rd Ed.) Ontario: Addiction Research Foundation.
3. Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol Office, NSW Department of Health. (2007). NSW Drug and Alcohol Withdrawal Clinical Practice Guidelines [PDF:1MB].

Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/

For information on pharmaceutical misuse • adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/pharmaceutical-misuse-2/

● Further information

DrugInfo • 1300 85 85 84

Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au (Australia-wide)



● Stay informed

 twitter.com/alcoholdrugfdn

 facebook.com/alcoholdrugfdn

● Contact us

 1300 85 85 84

adf.org.au