

Paracetamol.

What is paracetamol?

Paracetamol is a pharmaceutical drug, which is used to treat a number of conditions including:

- mild pain
- fever
- strong pain (when combined with codeine)
- colds and flu (when combined with antihistamines and decongestants).¹

Some people misuse paracetamol by intentionally taking more than the recommended dose, or as an act of self-harm.²

Paracetamol is usually swallowed and comes in different forms including:

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

Other names

Paracetamol may also be known by its brand or trade names. Some common examples include:

Paracetamol, other names

Generic name	Brand names
Paracetamol	Dymadon®, Lemsip®, Panadol®, Panamax®, Tylenol®
Paracetamol and codeine	Panadeine Forte®, Panamax Co®
Paracetamol, codeine and doxylamine	Mersyndol® and Mersyndol Forte®, Panalgesic®

Effects of paracetamol

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.

Paracetamol affects everyone differently, based on:

- 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 paracetamol are:

- drowsiness and fatigue
- rashes and itching.¹

Children may occasionally experience low blood sugar and tremors, and feeling hungry, faint and confused after taking paracetamol.¹

Overdose

If the dose is too high or the recommended daily dose is exceeded, an ambulance should be called straight away by dialling triple zero (000). Overdose symptoms, listed below, usually only occur 24 hours after taking the drug. An antidote can be administered if the ambulance is called soon after taking paracetamol.

- abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting
- liver problems
- seizures
- coma and death.

Death from paracetamol overdose can take between two and four days and is usually due to liver failure.²

Long-term effects

Regular use of paracetamol may eventually cause the following effects. It's best to discuss the side effects of long term use with a medical practitioner.

- tiredness
- breathlessness
- bluish tinge to fingers and lips
- anaemia (low red blood cell count)
- liver and kidney damage.¹

References

1. Upfal J. (2006) The Australian Drug Guide (7th Ed.) Melbourne: Black Inc.
2. Tittarelli, R., Pellegrini, M., Scarpellini, M. G., Marinelli, E., Bruti, V., Di Luca, N. M., & ... Zaami, S. (2017). Hepatotoxicity of paracetamol and related fatalities. European Review For Medical & Pharmacological Sciences, 2195.

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)



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