

Analgesics – oral

Analgesics form the largest category of medicines sold over the counter in pharmacies. Most products in the following list contain aspirin, paracetamol or ibuprofen, alone or in combination with codeine or dihydrocodeine. Most could be used to treat a wide variety of aches and pains but some are aimed at a narrower range of specific indications

They are suitable for headaches, cold and flu pains, toothache, fever, period pain and for the relief of muscular or rheumatic pain. Only where indications differ, particularly from the general list, are they quoted.

Aspirin has antipyretic, analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties. It acts by inhibiting prostaglandin. However, it causes gastric irritation and can damage the gastric mucosa. Therefore, it should not be taken on an empty stomach and is contra-indicated in patients with gastric ulcers. Since an association was confirmed between aspirin dosage in childhood and Reye's syndrome, the rare brain and liver disease, aspirin has not been recommended for children under 12 years of age.

Paracetamol has analgesic and antipyretic properties, but little anti-inflammatory actions, so is less useful for muscular problems. Overdosage with paracetamol causes hepatic damage that may not become apparent for four to six days. Patients should be advised not to exceed the stated dose.

Ibuprofen, like aspirin, has analgesic, anti-inflammatory and antipyretic activity. Ibuprofen can also damage the gastric mucosa and must always be taken with or after food or with milk. Asthmatics are advised to consult their doctor before taking ibuprofen. Certain brands of ibuprofen are available as GSL in 12 tablet packs.

Codeine and dihydrocodeine, both morphine derivatives are the strongest analgesics available of OTC sale. They are only available for OTC sale in combination products at relatively low doses.

Since SEPTEMBER 16. 1998 the quantity of solid dose forms of paracetamol and aspirin has been restricted for sale as GSL or P medicines.

Ordinarily, the restrictions are as follows: packs of paracetamol or aspirin tablets or capsules available from supermarkets and general

stores will, by law, contain no more than 6 tablets or capsules. Larger packs of 32 tablets or capsules will be available from pharmacies. Pharmacists will be able to supply up to 100 tablets in justifiable circumstances. For amounts of more than 100 tablets, a prescription will be required. Liquid paracetamol preparations will be available without pharmacists' supervision in limited quantities. Aspirin and paracetamol preparations in effervescent, powder and granule form are not affected. The regulations now apply to aloxiprin products. Too.

The pack size restriction for low-dose aspirin 75mg, allow Pharmacy only packs of 100 to be sold.

Packs of paracetamol need to carry the warnings: "Immediate medical advice should be sought in the event of an overdose, even if you feel well", and "Do not take any other products containing paracetamol."

Ibuprofen is not affected by the restrictions. Also, ibuprofen 200mg is available GSL in packs of up to 16 tablets or capsules.