

# Pain management

Pain is a normal part of life and can be a useful warning sign that something is wrong.

Very young children or children who are sick cannot always tell us exactly what they are feeling. This can be quite distressing for parents who may feel confused or unsure about what their child is experiencing.

Parents know their child's usual reactions and behaviours. There are different types of pain and they can usually be described as acute or chronic.

## Acute pain

The term acute pain refers to pain that is of recent onset and not long lasting.

The pain may be caused by an injury (e.g. broken arm, cuts and grazes,), illness (such as an earache or headache), operation or medical procedure.

Depending on what has caused the pain, it may last a few seconds (e.g. a needle) through to a few weeks or months (e.g. following an injury).

## Chronic pain

Chronic pain lasts for a longer period of time, usually longer than 3-6 months. This pain may be constant or come and go at different times. It is sometimes difficult to find a cause for chronic pain.

## How do you know your child is in pain?

Children show they are experiencing pain in a variety of ways, depending on their age. Infants may be unsettled, irritable or crying.

Children may show pain by altered facial expressions, like grimacing. They may pull at their ears, if they have an earache, or hold their stomach if they have abdominal pain. Older children will be able to tell parents where their pain is, and describe the type of pain (e.g. ache, sharp, dull, stabbing).

Some children may refuse to move or become quiet and withdrawn. Often children will be scared or frightened, as they often don't understand the concept of pain. It is important for parents to remain calm if their child is in pain, as parental anxiety can often make your child more distressed.

All children experiencing ongoing pain should be seen by a doctor.



# What can be done to help your child when they are in pain?

## Analgesics (pain control medication)

There are simple analgesics that can be bought over the counter at your local pharmacy. Your local pharmacist will be able to give you expert advice regarding how they work and how often to use these medications. All pain relief medications have instructions for use either written on the bottle or packet. If unsure always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Simple analgesics include:

- paracetamol (e.g. Panadol) in both liquid and tablet form for mild to moderate pain relief
- ibuprofen (Nurofen) in both liquid and tablet form for mild to moderate pain relief.

These simple analgesics are effective and safe to use to control pain and make children more comfortable. If your child has ongoing pain, your doctor may instruct you to give pain medication on a regular basis.

It is okay to give paracetamol, (such as Panadol), and ibuprofen (such as Nurofen) together as these are different medications.

You may wish to do this if your child's pain is unable to be controlled with one medication. It is extremely important that you do not give paracetamol and panadeine together as these both contain the same medication – paracetamol.

If you are unsure, please ask your local pharmacist. Always remember to seek medical advice for unexpected ongoing pain. If you need to bring your child to the GP or hospital, there is no need to withhold pain relief at home because you think it will "mask the symptoms," or prevent other pain relief from being given. The GP or the hospital staff can always tell if your child is in pain, and can give other medication if further pain control is required.

Medications should not be mixed with feeds in baby bottles as it is difficult to determine what dose the infant/child has had if they are reluctant with feeds and do not finish the bottle.



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