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2. Codeine

Codeine

Generic name: codeine [*KOE-deen*]

Drug classes: [Antitussives](#), [Opioids \(narcotic analgesics\)](#)

Medically reviewed by [Melisa Puckey, BPharm](#). Last updated on Aug 23, 2023.

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What is codeine?

Codeine is an opioid [pain reliever](#) which is used to treat mild to moderately severe [pain](#) and to help reduce [coughing](#). Codeine is available as a single ingredient tablet and also available in multi ingredients products combined with other pain relieving medicines or cold and flu medicines.

Warnings

You should not use codeine if you have severe breathing problems, a blockage in your stomach or intestines, or frequent [asthma](#) attacks or hyperventilation.

Codeine can slow or stop your breathing, cause profound sedation, and may be habit-forming. **MISUSE OF THIS MEDICINE CAN CAUSE ADDICTION, OVERDOSE, OR DEATH, especially in a child or other person using the medicine without a prescription.**

Codeine is not for use in anyone under 18 years old.

Taking codeine during pregnancy may cause life-threatening withdrawal symptoms in the newborn.

Fatal side effects can occur if you use codeine with alcohol, or with other drugs that cause drowsiness, sedation or slow your breathing.

Before taking this medicine

You should not use this medicine if you are allergic to it, or if you have:

- severe asthma or breathing problems;
- a blockage in your stomach or intestines; or
- frequent asthma attacks or hyperventilation.

In some people, codeine breaks down rapidly in the liver and reaches higher than normal levels in the body. This can

cause dangerously slow breathing and may cause death, especially in a child.

Do not give codeine to anyone younger than 18 years old.

To make sure this medicine is safe for you, tell your doctor if you have ever had:

- [liver disease](#);
- breathing problems, sleep apnea;
- asthma, [COPD](#), [sleep apnea](#), or other breathing disorders;
- abnormal curvature of the spine that affects breathing;
- kidney disease;
- a [head injury](#) or [brain tumor](#);
- [low blood pressure](#);
- blockage in your digestive tract (stomach or intestines);
- a gallbladder or pancreas disorder;
- [underactive thyroid](#);
- [Addison's disease](#) or other adrenal gland disorder;
- [enlarged prostate](#), urination problems; or
- mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction.

Some medicines can interact with codeine and cause a serious condition called serotonin syndrome. Be sure your doctor knows if you also take stimulant medicine, [herbal products](#), or medicine for [depression](#), mental illness, [Parkinson's disease](#), [migraine](#) headaches, serious infections, or prevention of [nausea](#) and [vomiting](#). Ask your doctor before making any changes in how or when you take your medications.

If you use this medicine while you are pregnant, your baby could become dependent on the drug. This can cause life-threatening withdrawal symptoms in the baby after it is born. Babies born dependent on habit-forming medicine may need medical treatment for several weeks. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.

Do not breast-feed while taking codeine. This medicine can pass into breast milk and cause drowsiness, breathing problems, or death in a nursing baby.

 [Codeine pregnancy and breastfeeding warnings](#) (more detail)

How should I take codeine?

Take codeine exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Follow all directions on your prescription label. Codeine can slow or stop your breathing. Never use this medicine in larger amounts, or for longer than prescribed. Tell your doctor if the medicine seems to stop working as well in relieving your pain.

Codeine may be habit-forming, even at regular doses. Never share this medicine with another person, especially someone with a history of drug abuse or addiction. **MISUSE OF NARCOTIC MEDICINE CAN CAUSE ADDICTION, OVERDOSE, OR DEATH, especially in a child or other person using the medicine without a prescription.** Selling or giving away codeine is against the law.

Take this medicine with food or milk if it upsets your stomach.

Drink 6 to 8 full glasses of water daily to help prevent [constipation](#) while you are taking this medicine. Do not use a stool softener (laxative) without first asking your doctor.

Do not stop using codeine suddenly after long-term use, or you could have unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. Ask your doctor how to safely stop using this medicine.

Store at room temperature away from moisture and heat. Keep track of your medicine. Codeine is a drug of abuse and you should be aware if anyone is using your medicine improperly or without a prescription.

Do not keep leftover opioid medication. **Just one dose can cause death in someone using this medicine accidentally or improperly.** Ask your pharmacist where to locate a drug take-back disposal program. If there is no take-back program, mix the leftover medicine with cat litter or coffee grounds in a sealed plastic bag throw the bag in the trash.

 [Codeine patient tips](#) (more detail)

What happens if I miss a dose?

Since this medicine is used for pain, you are not likely to miss a dose. Skip any missed dose if it is almost time for your next scheduled dose. Do not take extra medicine to make up the missed dose.

What happens if I overdose?

Seek emergency medical attention or call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222. **A codeine overdose can be fatal, especially in a child or other person using the medicine without a prescription.** Overdose can cause severe muscle weakness, cold and clammy skin, pinpoint pupils, very slow breathing, extreme drowsiness, or coma.

What to avoid

Do not drink alcohol. Dangerous side effects or death could occur.

Codeine may impair your thinking or reactions. Avoid driving or operating machinery until you know how this medicine will affect you. [Dizziness](#) or severe drowsiness can cause falls or other accidents.

Codeine side effects

Get emergency medical help if you have **signs of an allergic reaction to codeine:** [hives](#); difficult breathing; swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat.

Like other narcotic medicines, codeine can slow your breathing. Death may occur if breathing becomes too weak.

A person caring for you should seek emergency medical attention if you have slow breathing with long pauses, blue colored lips, or if you are hard to wake up.

Call your doctor at once if you have:

- noisy breathing, sighing, shallow breathing, breathing that stops during sleep;
- a [slow heart rate](#) or weak pulse;

- a light-headed feeling, like you might pass out;
- confusion, [agitation](#), hallucinations, unusual thoughts or behavior;
- feelings of extreme happiness or sadness;
- seizure (convulsions);
- problems with urination; or
- low cortisol levels--nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, dizziness, worsening tiredness or weakness.

Seek medical attention right away if you have symptoms of serotonin syndrome, such as: agitation, hallucinations, [fever](#), sweating, shivering, [fast heart rate](#), muscle stiffness, twitching, loss of coordination, nausea, vomiting, or [diarrhea](#).

Serious side effects may be more likely in older adults and those who are [overweight](#), malnourished, or debilitated.

Long-term use of opioid medication may affect fertility (ability to have children) in men or women. It is not known whether opioid effects on fertility are permanent.

Common codeine side effects include:

- feeling dizzy or drowsy;
- nausea, vomiting, stomach pain;
- constipation;
- sweating; or
- mild itching or [rash](#).

This is not a complete list of side effects and others may occur. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

 [Codeine side effects](#) (more detail)

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Dosing information

Usual Adult Dose for Pain:

Initial dose: 15 to 60 mg orally up to every 4 hours as needed

Maximum dose: 360 mg in 24 hours

Comments:

-Initial doses should be individualized taking into account severity of pain, response, prior analgesic treatment experience, and risk factors for addiction, abuse, and misuse.

-Doses higher than 60 mg have not been shown to improve pain relief and are associated with an increased incidence of adverse effects.

-Because of the risks of addiction, abuse and misuse, the lowest effective dose for the shortest duration consistent with individual patient treatment goals should be used.

-Monitor patients closely for [respiratory depression](#) within the first 24 to 72 hours of initiating therapy and following any increase in dose.

Use: For the management of mild to moderate pain where treatment with an opioid is appropriate and from which alternative treatments are inadequate.

 [Detailed Codeine dosage information](#)

What other drugs will affect codeine?

You may have breathing problems or withdrawal symptoms if you start or stop taking certain other medicines.

Tell your doctor if you also use an antibiotic, antifungal medication, heart or blood pressure medication, seizure medication, or medicine to treat HIV or hepatitis C.

Opioid medication can interact with many other drugs and cause dangerous side effects or death. Be sure your doctor knows if you also use:

- cold or allergy medicines, bronchodilator asthma/COPD medication, or a diuretic ("water pill");
- medicines for motion sickness, irritable bowel syndrome, or overactive bladder;
- **other narcotic medications** - opioid pain medicine or prescription cough medicine;
- **a sedative like Valium** - diazepam, alprazolam, lorazepam, Xanax, Klonopin, Versed, and others;
- **drugs that make you sleepy or slow your breathing** - a sleeping pill, muscle relaxer, medicine to treat mood disorders or mental illness; or
- **drugs that affect serotonin levels in your body**- a stimulant, or medicine for depression, Parkinson's disease, migraine headaches, serious infections, or nausea and vomiting.

This list is not complete. Other drugs may interact with codeine, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, [vitamins](#), and [herbal products](#). Not all possible interactions are listed in this medication guide.

 [Codeine drug interactions](#) (more detail)

Does codeine interact with my other drugs?

Enter medications to view a detailed interaction report using our [Drug Interaction Checker](#).

codeine

+

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Further information

Remember, keep this and all other medicines out of the reach of children, never share your medicines with others, and use codeine only for the indication prescribed.

Always consult your healthcare provider to ensure the information displayed on this page applies to your personal circumstances.

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DRUG STATUS

Availability

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 Risk data available

CSA Schedule*

2 High potential for abuse



Approval History

 Drug history at FDA



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7.8 / 10

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