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Pain Relievers

Also called: Analgesics, Pain killers, Pain medicines

What are pain relievers?

Pain relievers are medicines that reduce or relieve headaches [<https://medlineplus.gov/headache.html>] , sore muscles, arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html>] , or other aches and pains [<https://medlineplus.gov/pain.html>] . There are many different pain medicines, and each with advantages and risks. Some types of pain respond better to certain medicines than others. Each person may also have a slightly different response to a pain reliever.

What are the types of over-the-counter pain relievers?

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/overthecountermedicines.html>] are good for many types of pain. Two types of OTC pain medicines are usually recommended for mild to moderate pain.

- **Acetaminophen (Tylenol)** is used in many OTC and prescription medicines. It's often considered safer than other pain relievers. Unfortunately, it's common for people to **take too much accidentally** [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/acetaminophen-level/>] . Be careful not to take too much each day or use more than one medicine with acetaminophen. Check with your health care provider before taking medicines containing acetaminophen for more than ten days or five days for your child.
- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** include aspirin, naproxen (Aleve), and ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). These pain relievers are often most effective if you have pain and inflammation (swelling), such as for arthritis or menstrual cramps [<https://medlineplus.gov/menstruation.html>] . If you take more than the recommended amount, NSAIDs may cause nausea [<https://medlineplus.gov/nauseaandvomiting.html>] , stomach pain, or ulcers.

What are prescription pain relievers?

If OTC pain relievers don't relieve your pain, your provider may prescribe something stronger. Many NSAIDs are also available at higher prescription doses.

The most powerful pain relievers are opioids, sometimes called narcotics. They include strong prescription pain relievers such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, or morphine. Opioids are sometimes used to treat moderate to severe pain. Your provider may give you a prescription to reduce pain after you have had a major injury or surgery.

Opioids are very effective, but they can sometimes have serious side effects. There is also a risk of **addiction** [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>] . Because of the risks, you must use them only under your provider's supervision.

What are some non-drug treatments for pain?

Pain relievers are just one part of a pain treatment plan. Environmental factors, **stress** [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>] , and beliefs about pain may affect the way you feel about pain and respond to treatment.

There are many things you can do to help ease pain. Treatment depends on the cause and type of pain. It's important to check with your provider before trying any of them. A few **non-drug treatments** [<https://medlineplus.gov/nondrugpainmanagement.html>] for pain include:



- Acupuncture [<https://medlineplus.gov/acupuncture.html>]

- Hot or cold packs
- Massage therapy
- Physical therapy
- Relaxation techniques



Start Here

- Chronic Pain Medicines [<https://familydoctor.org/chronic-pain-medicines/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/medicamentos-para-el-dolor-cronico/?adfree=true>]
- Pain Relievers: Understanding Your OTC Options [<https://familydoctor.org/pain-relievers-understanding-your-otc-options/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/medicamentos-analgesicos-de-venta-libre/?adfree=true>]
- Treatment of Pain [https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/brain-spinal-cord-and-nerve-disorders/pain/treatment-of-pain?ruredirectid=29#Acetaminophen_v734833] (Merck & Co., Inc.)

Diagnosis and Tests

- Acetaminophen Level [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/acetaminophen-level/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/nivel-de-acetaminofen/>]
- Salicylates Level [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/salicylates-level/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/nivel-de-salicilatos/>]

Related Issues

- Don't Overuse Acetaminophen [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/dont-overuse-acetaminophen>]
(Food and Drug Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/articulos-para-el-consumidor-en-espanol/no-abuse-del-acetaminofen>]
- Keeping Kidneys Safe: Smart Choices about Medicines [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/kidney-disease/keeping-kidneys-safe>]   (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
- Pain Management after Surgery [<https://familydoctor.org/pain-control-after-surgery-pain-medicines/?adfree=true>]
(American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/control-del-dolor-despues-de-la-cirugia-medicamentos-para-el-dolor/?adfree=true>]


Specifics

- Chronic Pain Medicines [<https://familydoctor.org/chronic-pain-medicines/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/medicamentos-para-el-dolor-cronico/?adfree=true>]
- Chronic Pain: Medication Decisions [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/back-pain/in-depth/chronic-pain-medication-decisions/art-20360371?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/back-pain/in-depth/chronic-pain-medication-decisions/art-20360371?p=1>]
- Cortisone Shots [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cortisone-shots/about/pac-20384794?p=1>]
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/tests-procedures/cortisone-shots/about/pac-20384794?p=1>]
- Nerve Blocks [<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/nerveblock>]
(American College of Radiology; Radiological Society of North America)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/es/info/nerveblock>]
- NSAIDs (Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs) [<https://rheumatology.org/patients/nsaids-nonsteroidal-anti-inflammatory-drugs>] (American College of Rheumatology)
Also in Spanish [<https://rheumatology.org/patients/aines-medicamentos-antiinflamatorios-no-esteroides>]
- Prescription Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Medicines [<https://familydoctor.org/prescription-nonsteroidal-anti-inflammatory-medicines/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/medicamentos-para-el-dolor-que-requieren-prescripcion/?adfree=true>]



Safe Opioid Use and Disposal [<https://familydoctor.org/safe-use-storage-and-disposal-of-opioid-drugs/?adfree=true>]

(American Academy of Family Physicians)

Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/uso-almacenamiento-y-desecho-seguro-de-medicamentos-opioides/?adfree=true>]

- **New!** Should You Take Pills or Use Patches for Pain Relief? [<https://www.health.harvard.edu/pain/should-you-take-pills-or-use-patches-for-pain-relief>] (Harvard Medical School)
- Support for People with Cancer: Cancer Pain Control [<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/paincontrol.pdf>]  (National Cancer Institute) - PDF

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Analgesics [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?intr=%22Analgesics%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Narcotics [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?intr=narcotics&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles


References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Paracetamol and Caffeine Combination in Pain Management: A Narrative Review. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40740590>]
- Article: Comparative efficacy of ibuprofen and low-level laser therapy on pain intensity... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40725907>]
- Article: The causal link between osteoarthritis and falls: the mediating role of... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40711723>]
- Pain Relievers -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Analgesics%2C+Non-Narcotic%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- Food and Drug Administration [<https://www.fda.gov/>]

Children

- Accidental Exposures to Fentanyl Patches Continue to Be Deadly to Children [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/accidental-exposures-fentanyl-patches-continue-be-deadly-children>]  (Food and Drug Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/articulos-para-el-consumidor-en-espanol/la-exposicion-accidental-los-parches-de-fentanilo-sigue-siendo-mortal-para-los-ninos>]
- Acetaminophen Overdose Is Serious and It Can Happen More Easily Than You Might Think [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/acetaminophen/art-20046721?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/acetaminophen/art-20046721?p=1>]

Women

- Women and Pain Medicines [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/womens-health-topics/women-and-pain-medicines>] (Food and Drug Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/womens-health-topics/las-mujeres-y-los-analgescicos-women-and-pain-medicines>]

Patient Handouts

- Acetaminophen dosing for children [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000783.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000783.htm>]
- Ibuprofen dosing for children [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000772.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)

Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000772.htm>]

- Over-the-counter pain relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002123.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/002123.htm>]
- Pain medications - narcotics [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007489.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/007489.htm>]
- Taking narcotics for back pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000413.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000413.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Acetaminophen dosing for children [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000783.htm>]

Acetaminophen overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002598.htm>]

Analgesic nephropathy [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000482.htm>]

Aspirin overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002542.htm>]

Diclofenac sodium overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002630.htm>]

Fenoprofen calcium overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002649.htm>]

Ibuprofen dosing for children [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000772.htm>]

Ibuprofen overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002655.htm>]

Indomethacin overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002657.htm>]

Ketoprofen overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002661.htm>]

Meclofenamate overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002671.htm>]

Naproxen sodium overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002507.htm>]

Over-the-counter pain relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002123.htm>]

Pain medications - narcotics [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007489.htm>]

Pentazocine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002519.htm>]

Piroxicam overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002534.htm>]

Propoxyphene overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002537.htm>]

Sulindac overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002551.htm>]

Taking narcotics for back pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000413.htm>]

Tolmetin overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002558.htm>]

Related Health Topics

- Chronic Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicpain.html>]
- Medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/medicines.html>]
- Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>]
- Over-the-Counter Medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/overthecountermedicines.html>]
- Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/pain.html>]

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