

## Combination analgesics

Whilst it is recognised that chronic pain is complex with challenges for assessment and management,<sup>1-3</sup> combination analgesic preparations that contain a simple analgesic, e.g. paracetamol with an opioid, or a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) are commonly used. These reduce the scope for effective titration of the individual components in the management of pain of varying intensity.<sup>4</sup>

### Key recommendations

- Combination analgesics should not be a first-line treatment choice. The use of single-ingredient analgesics is preferred to allow for independent titration of each drug.
- When assessing pain, determine whether there is a need for a non-opioid and an opioid analgesic to be taken simultaneously. Ensure that an adequate dose of each analgesic is used.
- Be aware that the advantages of lower doses of codeine, 8mg or 15mg have not been substantiated. The low dose of the opioid may be enough to cause opioid side-effects (in particular, constipation) and can complicate the treatment of overdosage, yet may not provide significant additional relief from pain.
- Combination analgesics (except those with low-dose opioids, e.g. co-codamol 8mg/500mg, co-dydramol 100mg/500mg) may be considered for those with stable chronic pain and for people taking a lot of tablets to reduce the number of tablets taken.
- Do not initiate co-proxamol for any new patient.
- Review all patients still being prescribed co-proxamol to assess their pain management and switch them to an alternative pain management regime (either drug or non-drug treatment) for safety concerns, particularly toxicity in overdose.
- Non-pharmacological measures and/or paracetamol or NSAIDs are preferred options for mild secondary chronic pain, for example in endometriosis, headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, low back pain, sciatica, neuropathic pain, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and spondyloarthritis.
- Be aware that headaches, period pain, mild fever and back pain can be treated at home with over the counter (OTC) pain relief and lifestyle changes; note that quantities for purchase may be restricted e.g. to a three day supply. Refer to the [PrescQIPP bulletin: Self care – Over the counter items](#).

### Savings

Table 1 provides data on potential savings on combination analgesic prescribing across England, Wales and Scotland. Further savings can be made through reducing the prescribing of combination analgesics which are available to purchase OTC in packs of 32 or less.

**Table 1: Combination analgesics potential annual savings [NHSBSA (Nov22-Jan23) and Public Health Scotland (Oct-Dec 22)]**

Combination analgesic saving	England savings	Wales savings	Scotland savings	Annual savings per 100,000
10% reduction in prescribing of combination analgesics (not included below)	£5,950,525	£645,002	£1,359,099	£11,139
80% switch co-codamol (8mg/500mg, 15mg/500mg, 30mg/500mg) capsules to tablets	£6,380,779	£670,527	£963,773	£11,223
25% switch of co-codamol effervescent tablets to co-codamol plain tablets	£4,710,531	£293,367	£579,833	£7,819
50% reduction in co-proxamol tablets	£786,904	£13,061	Data not available	£1,120
<b>Total</b>	<b>£17,828,739</b>	<b>£1,621,957</b>	<b>£2,902,705</b>	<b>£31,301</b>

## References

1. NICE. Chronic pain (primary and secondary) in over 16s: assessment of all chronic pain and management of chronic primary pain. NICE guideline [NG193]. Published April 2021. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng193>
2. Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN). Management of chronic pain (136). First published December 2013, revised edition published August 2019. <https://www.sign.ac.uk/our-guidelines/management-of-chronic-pain/>
3. All Wales Medicines Strategy Group. All Wales Analgesic Stewardship Guidance. November 2022. <https://awttc.nhs.wales/files/guidelines-and-pils/all-wales-analgesic-stewardship-guidancepdf/>
4. Joint Formulary Committee. British National Formulary (online) London: BMJ Group and Pharmaceutical Press. <https://www.medicinescomplete.com/> accessed 16/03/23.

Additional resources available	Bulletin	<a href="https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-324-combination-analgesics/">https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-324-combination-analgesics/</a>
	Tools	
	Data pack	<a href="https://data.prescqipp.info/?pdata.u/#/views/B324_Prescribingofcombinationanalgesics/FrontPage?:iid=1">https://data.prescqipp.info/?pdata.u/#/views/B324_Prescribingofcombinationanalgesics/FrontPage?:iid=1</a>

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