

Codeine facts

What is codeine?

Codeine is a prescription drug, and is part of a group of drugs known as opioids. Opioids are depressant drugs, which means they slow down the messages travelling between the brain and the rest of the body. Other opioids include opium, heroin, morphine and oxycodone.

Codeine is used to provide relief from a number of conditions, including:

- Mild to moderate pain
- Severe pain (when combined with aspirin or paracetamol)
- Dry irritating cough
- Diarrhoea
- Cold and flu (when combined with antihistamines and decongestants)

Some people misuse codeine by intentionally taking more than the recommended dose to get 'high', or as an act of self-harm.

Codeine is usually swallowed and comes in different forms, including:

- Tablets
- Capsules
- Suppositories
- Soluble powders and tablets
- Liquids

Other names

Codeine may also be known by a brand or trade name. Some common examples are:

Generic name	Brand names
Aspirin and codeine	Aspalgin [®] , Codral Cold & Flu Original [®]
Ibuprofen and codeine	Nurofen Plus [®]
Paracetamol, codeine and doxylamine	Panadeine Forte [®] , Panamax Co [®]
Paracetamol, codeine and doxylamine	Mersyndol [®] and Mersyndol Forte [®] , Panalgesic [®]

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Effects of codeine

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk – even medications can produce unwanted side effects. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Codeine affects everyone differently, based on:

- The person's size, weight and health
- Whether the person is used to taking it
- Whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- The amount taken

Side effects

The most common side effects of codeine are:

- Dizziness
- Tiredness
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Euphoria, restlessness
- Blurred vision
- Dry mouth
- Limbs feeling heavy or muscles feeling stiff
- Sweating
- Mild allergic rash, itching and hives
- Decreased heart rate, palpitations
- Stomach-ache, nausea, vomiting, constipation
- Difficulty urinating

These side effects may disappear with continued treatment, but if they persist, speak to a medical practitioner.

Overdose

If the dose is too high, the following symptoms may be experienced. If any of the following effects are experienced, an ambulance should be called straightaway by dialling triple zero (000).

- Inability to pass urine
- Severe constipation and obstructed bowel
- Agitation
- Cold clammy skin with a bluish tinge
- Mental numbness
- Very slow, shallow breathing
- Hallucinations and sometimes seizures

- Coma and death

Long-term effects of codeine

Regular use of codeine may eventually cause the following effects. It's best to discuss the side effects of long-term use with a medical practitioner.

- Constipation
- Reduced sex drive
- Irregular periods
- Tension and muscle twitches
- Needing to use more to get the same effect
- Dependence on codeine
- Financial, work and social problems

Using codeine with other drugs

The effects of taking codeine with other drugs, including alcohol, prescription medications and other over-the-counter medicines, are often unpredictable.

Codeine taken with alcohol can cause mental clouding, reduced coordination and slow breathing.

Withdrawal

Giving up codeine after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Please seek advice from a medical professional.

Withdrawal symptoms usually start within a few hours after the last dose and become strongest between 48 and 72 hours. These symptoms can include:

- Cravings for codeine
- Dilated pupils
- Abdominal cramps, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Runny nose and sneezing
- Yawning and difficulty sleeping
- Trembling, aching muscles and joints
- Goosebumps, fever, chills, sweating
- Restlessness, irritability, nervousness, depression

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May 2016