Combogesic

SUPPORTING YOUR CUSTOMERS WITH

DOUBLE ACTION PAIN RELIEF

Pain affects everyone at some point. It is experienced differently by each customer and has varying impacts for everyone. Pain can be challenging to effectively manage, so tailoring advice to your customers' individual circumstances is key to successfully easing it.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

IDENTIFY the different types of pain.

DESCRIBE how certain analgesics work to relieve pain.

EXPLAIN the benefits of Combogesic as a combination analgesic product.

PAIN AND ANALGESIA

Acute or chronic pain

Pain can be described as acute or chronic. Acute pain occurs suddenly and lasts a relatively short time, and is often caused by injury or trauma that can vary in intensity from mild to severe.[1] Chronic pain persists for a long period of time – usually months.[1]

Acute pain is experienced due to prostaglandin synthesis, which occurs at the site of tissue damage or infection. These prostaglandins influence blood flow and inflammation at the site and send pain signals to the brain, influencing pain perception.[2]

Pain is considered chronic or persistent when it lasts for long periods of time (more than 3 months).[1] Customers suffering with chronic pain should be referred to the pharmacist or GP for further advice.

Analgesics

Examples of analgesics (painkillers) used to treat mild to moderate pain include paracetamol and ibuprofen.[3]

- **Paracetamol** is understood to act within the central nervous system, helping to modulate pain signalling.
- **Ibuprofen** works by inhibiting prostaglandin synthesis, helping to reduce inflammation and associated pain signalling.

CHOOSING YOUR ANALGESIC

It is important to recommend the most appropriate analgesic for the customer depending on the type of acute pain, as well as individual factors such as any other medication they are taking, their medical history and any specific preferences. Guidelines for the specific condition should be used where possible, as well as considering the underlying cause.[3]

Typically, paracetamol or ibuprofen would be considered first line for pain relief and a customer should be advised to switch to the other, when suitable, after trying one of these individually at their full therapeutic dose. If this is not relieving the customer's pain, paracetamol and ibuprofen can be used in combination to provide synergistic pain relief through their different mechanisms of action.[3]

Weak opioids can also be used in combination with paracetamol or ibuprofen to provide pain relief. However, these come with a risk of addiction and dependence and should therefore be recommended with caution.[3]

THE FACTS ABOUT UK OPIOID USE

44.5 DEATHS PER MILLION — Opioid-related deaths in England and Wales nearly doubled between 2012 and 2024, rising from 22.9 deaths per million people to **44.5 deaths per million people**[4]

£270 MILLION — 39 million opioid drugs were prescribed in England in 2024/25 **at a cost of £270 million**[5]

£137 MILLION — In England, opioid-related hospitalisations **rose by 49% over a decade***, with an estimated healthcare **cost of £137million**[6]

42% — In 2024-2025, **just over two-fifths (42%)** of adults in treatment in England were there for problems with opioids[7]

The appropriate recommendation of over-the-counter opioids is crucial to help mitigate the risk of dependence and addiction.

***Opioid-related admissions 2008-2018**

Combogesic® is 80% more effective than paracetamol alone and 18 minutes faster at providing meaningful pain relief than ibuprofen taken alone.[8,9]

Combogesic® is a unique combination analgesic product containing 500mg paracetamol and 150mg ibuprofen in a single tablet. The two active ingredients work in complementary ways to help relieve pain and reduce inflammation.

Combogesic® can be used to relieve headache, migraine, muscular pain, back pain, period pain, dental pain, sore throat, fever, and aches and pains associated with cold and flu.

Combogesic® brings paracetamol and ibuprofen together in one unique opioid-free combination that is scientifically developed to quickly and effectively reduce pain and inflammation.

The formulation is clinically optimised with a lower ibuprofen load per tablet. This lower non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) exposure helps to reduce gastrointestinal risk for patients.

Combogesic® provides an alternative pain relief option when codeine is not tolerated due to side effects, contraindications or due to patient preferences to avoid opioids.

A systematic review of 26 clinical trials showed that adding codeine to paracetamol produced only a modest increase in analgesic effect.[10] Conversely, Combogesic®'s synergistic combination of paracetamol and ibuprofen is 80% more effective than paracetamol alone.[8,9]

UNDERSTANDING COMBOGESIC®

What is Combogesic®?

Combogesic® is a unique fixed dose combination of paracetamol 500mg and ibuprofen 150mg. The two active ingredients work together in different yet complementary ways to help relieve pain, reduce fever and reduce inflammation (ibuprofen) at the same time. Combogesic® was developed as a more effective form of pain relief than paracetamol or ibuprofen alone.

Why does Combogesic® combine paracetamol at 500mg and ibuprofen at 150mg?

Clinical trials confirm the unique 3.3:1 ratio used in Combogesic®- paracetamol at 500mg and ibuprofen at 150mg - is a gold standard synergistic treatment balancing maximum pain relief from both compounds with a lower dose of ibuprofen to reduce risk of gastric side effects.[11] In addition, the unique 3.3:1 ratio used in Combogesic® delivers a distinct synergistic effect in acute pain.[11]

What type of pain can Combogesic® be used for?

Combogesic® provides temporary relief from a wide range of pain including headache, migraine, muscular pain, back pain, period pain, toothache, aches and pains associated with cold and flu and sore throat, as well as fever.[12]

How does Combogesic® differ from taking paracetamol and ibuprofen separately?

Paracetamol and ibuprofen administered at the same time show an additive, synergistic reduction in pain scores.[13] Alternate staggered dosing of each individual active ingredient by separate administration has not been shown to produce a statistically significant difference in pain scores, suggesting that the synergistic effect is lost with alternate dosing of paracetamol and ibuprofen. This indicates that the co-administration of the two active ingredients - paracetamol and ibuprofen - is crucial for the synergy to be effective.[13]

Are there any circumstances in which Combogesic® should not be taken?

If you customer is pregnant or breastfeeding, or is planning on becoming pregnant, refer them to the pharmacist as Combogesic® may not be suitable. Combogesic® should not be taken if the patient has a stomach ulcer, impaired kidney function or severe heart failure; is allergic to paracetamol, ibuprofen, aspirin or other anti-inflammatory medicines; or is under 18 years of age. Unless a doctor has advised otherwise, Combogesic® should not be taken by people with asthma, or alongside other medicines containing paracetamol, ibuprofen, aspirin or other anti-inflammatory medicines. Patients are advised to always read the label and consult a healthcare professional before taking Combogesic® for the first time.[12] Refer to the SmPC for a full list of contraindications.

HOW SHOULD COMBOGESIC® BE TAKEN?

Combogesic® is licensed for adults aged 18 years and over.[12]

- Take **1–2 tablets** with a full glass of water.
- Doses may be repeated **every 6 hours as required**.
- Do not exceed **6 tablets in 24 hours**.
- Do not use for **more than 3 days** unless advised by a healthcare professional.
- Do not take with other medicines containing **paracetamol or ibuprofen** to avoid exceeding the recommended daily doses.

Does Combogesic® have any side effects?

As with all medicines, Combogesic® can cause side effects although not everyone experiences them. Some side effects to be aware of include nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea, heartburn, skin rashes and loss of appetite. While uncommon, customers should be made aware of indicators of gastric irritation including blood in vomit or stools. The lower dose of ibuprofen minimises the risk of gastric irritation from ibuprofen and taking the medicine with food can also reduce this risk further.

SELF-CARE ADVICE

Pain is experienced differently by each person and can be affected by individual circumstances and have different impacts. As well as analgesics to help manage acute pain, customers could benefit from advice to help them feel more comfortable as well as prevent their pain recurring.

Headache[14]

Headaches usually go away on their own, but they can last from as little as 30 minutes up to a few days. Resting and drinking plenty of water can help to ease a headache. Eye strain can lead to headaches so being conscious of screen time and taking regular breaks is important.

Migraine[15]

Migraine is a condition causing symptoms including an intense headache, nausea and sensitivity to light. Analgesics can help to manage the headache and other advice to support your customer could include lying down or sleeping in a dark room and drinking plenty of water. To prevent migraines, customers can be advised to eat at regular times and exercise regularly. Reducing caffeine and alcohol intake and managing stress can also be beneficial.

Back pain[16]

While back pain will often improve within a few weeks, customers can help speed up their recovery by:

- Trying to stay active and continue with normal routines
- Using an ice pack wrapped in a tea towel for pain and swelling
- Using a heat pack or hot water bottle to relieve joint stiffness or muscle spasms.

There are exercises and stretches that can be helpful to relieve back pain but it is important to stop if pain is experienced doing these.

Period pain[17]

Customers may experience period pain just before their period starts or at the beginning of their period. It can be experienced as stomach ache or back ache with cramping pains. Customers may find that having a warm bath or shower, using a heat pad or hot water bottle wrapped in a tea towel on their tummy or some gentle massage of the stomach or back helps with the pains. Gentle exercise, such as yoga, swimming, walking or cycling can also help to ease discomfort.

Toothache[18]

Toothache can be extremely painful for customers but there are ways to ease the pain alongside taking oral analgesics. A pain-relieving mouth gel can be used and rinsing the mouth with salt water can be beneficial for adults too. Eating soft food, such as eggs and yogurt, and avoiding eating on the sore tooth can prevent further discomfort. Customers can be advised to use a soft toothbrush and avoid flossing around the tooth too.

Fever, aches and pains associated with cold and flu[19]

Alongside taking oral analgesics, customers should be advised to drink plenty of fluids, eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest. Colds and flu can be easily spread so counsel the customer on good hand hygiene to help prevent further transmission.

Understanding the customer's specific ideas, concerns and expectations can help you to make the most appropriate recommendation for their situation and tailor your advice to the customer's circumstances, preferences and type of pain being experienced.

CASE STUDY SCENARIO

Reflect on your approach to the following case study. You could discuss your thoughts with a colleague.

A 38-year-old patient requests pain relief for acute lower back pain after lifting heavy boxes. They have no history of gastric ulcer, kidney disease or NSAID allergy and are not taking any regular medicines.

CONSIDER:

- Could Combogesic® be appropriate?
- What questions would you ask before recommending it?
- What advice would you provide?
- What safety netting would you provide regarding maximum dose and duration?

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Pain is experienced uniquely by the individual and requires a tailored approach.
- First line management of pain includes use of either paracetamol or ibuprofen[3].
- Combination pain relief can be used to provide synergistic pain relief.[11]

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PAGE

1. Combogesic® provides meaningful pain relief how much faster than ibuprofen alone?

a. 5 minutes
b. 10 minutes
c. 15 minutes
d. 18 minutes

2. Which of the following statements about the use of weak opioids for pain management over the counter is true?

a. Codeine in combination with paracetamol should be recommended first line for pain relief.
b. Codeine in combination with ibuprofen should be recommended first line for pain relief.
c. The use of weak opioids has a risk of addiction and dependence.
d. Weak opioids can be safely recommended for long term use over the counter.

3. Which of the following is not a contraindication to taking Combogesic®?

a. Severe heart failure
b. History of migraines
c. Allergy to paracetamol or ibuprofen
d. History of stomach ulcers

4. Which of the following would be good advice to customers to help them manage their pain?

a. Taking a warm bath or shower can help ease period pain.
b. Use a hard toothbrush and floss around the sore tooth to ease dental pain.
c. Fluids should be restricted for a fever.
d. Regular exercise should be avoided if you experience migraines.

Answers 1d, 2c, 3b, 4a

For Combogesic product information and information on adverse events reporting, scan the QR code

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