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Australia reveals ineffectiveness of paracetamol for low back pain

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Surprising revelations about the world's most popular pain reliever



The largest review of paracetamol for pain relief, led by University of Sydney, Australia, has found only four conditions where it was shown to relieve pain and confirmed paracetamol was ineffective for low back pain despite its common use.

Key findings:

- Paracetamol only had evidence of effectiveness as a pain reliever for four conditions studied: knee or hip osteoarthritis; (general, not migrane) tension headache; perineal pain after childbirth (between the anus and genital area); and craniotomy (removal of part of the skull); the effect for these conditions was modest.
- The evidence for lower back pain is that it provides no better outcomes than placebo; however, the healing effect of time could be mistaken for medicine efficacy.
- For the remaining conditions e.g. abdominal pain, pain during dental procedures, migraines and middle ear infection, it was unclear whether paracetamol relieved pain.
- Most studies that have been done to date were just for single-dose (taken on one occasion only i.e 1-2 tablets), whereas paracetamol is commonly taken more than once to treat a symptom.

“This review for the first time brings together all the existing evidence about the efficacy of paracetamol to treat pain in one document,” said Dr Abdel Shaheed, from the School of Public Health.

Dr Abdel Shaheed concluded that people should not be relying on pain medicines as a standalone treatment for pain relief.