

# Paracetamol poisoning – for patients receiving SNAP protocol

This leaflet explains about paracetamol poisoning (overdose). If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## Paracetamol poisoning

You have been given this leaflet as you have been assessed and will be receiving treatment following a paracetamol overdose. Please read this leaflet carefully before you leave hospital.

## What are the risks of a paracetamol overdose?

Paracetamol is a common painkiller that is normally safe but can be harmful to the liver, and rarely the kidneys, when taken in amounts above the recommended doses.

## What are the risks to me?

You have been assessed by the medical team and, based on the information you have provided and the result of blood tests taken, you need some treatment to prevent damage to your liver.

## What treatment will I be given?

The treatment is a medicine called acetylcysteine and it is given through an intravenous infusion (a drip). In this hospital all patients needing this medicine are treated using the Scottish and Newcastle Acetylcysteine protocol (SNAP treatment). This protocol is not yet licensed by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Authority (MHRA). However specialist units with experience of treating patients with paracetamol overdoses, believe that SNAP is better because:

- it uses the same dose of acetylcysteine but involves fewer infusions through a drip than the old method (two infusions instead of three)
- it requires a shorter time on the drip for most patients (12 hours instead of 21)
- side effects such as itching and vomiting (being sick) are less common
- it is likely to be as effective at preventing liver damage as the old method of giving acetylcysteine.

We will check your blood after you have had the acetylcysteine to be sure that you are not at risk of developing liver problems. These blood tests will be taken at the end of the second acetylcysteine infusion and, if necessary, repeated so that we have results from a blood test taken at least 24 hours after paracetamol was last taken. If there are any problems with these blood tests, the clinical team will discuss the results with you and you may need to be treated with more acetylcysteine.

## Is there anything I should do before I leave hospital?

We will only discharge you when your blood tests show that you are not at risk of developing liver problems. It is very important that the information you gave us about the tablets that you took is as accurate as possible, as the doctors and nurses have used this information when assessing you and your risk of liver damage. In particular, are you certain

- when you took the tablets?
- the number of tablets that you took?
- whether you took the tablets all at once or over more than an hour?

If you have forgotten to tell us any of this information, or think that something you have already told us may not be correct, you should inform the doctor or nurse immediately, before you leave hospital.

## What should I do after I leave hospital?

You will only be discharged from the hospital when the team looking after you feel that the risk of developing liver damage is very low, based on the information you provided and the blood test results. We do not think that you will be at risk of any long-term health effects.

**IMPORTANT:** If you develop any of the following symptoms **you must seek medical advice immediately.**

- Abdominal (stomach) pain, feeling or being sick
- Yellow discolouration of the skin or whites of the eyes (jaundice)
- Severe headache, confusion or drowsiness
- Passing no urine at all for the past eight hours

## What should I do if I have a problem?

If you have any further questions or require further medical help call NHS 111 on **t:** 111.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, please contact the Clinical Toxicology team on 020 7188 5848 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please contact NHS111, your GP or, if you have any of the symptoms in the box above, go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) to be assessed.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

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