



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Codeine changes won't hurt if you talk to your health professional

The National Prescribing Service is recommending people with chronic pain speak to their doctor or pharmacist before changes to the way codeine is sold in Australia come into effect.

From Saturday 1 May over-the-counter pain relief products containing codeine (e.g. Nurofen Plus, Panadeine) will only be available directly from a pharmacist and pack sizes will be reduced to five-day quantities.

The NPS says a number of people who suffer chronic pain caused by arthritis and serious injuries often turn to over-the-counter products to manage break-through pain but over time may develop dependency and end up using more than is recommended.

Research conducted by Arthritis NSW in 2007 found 79% of respondents who said they were taking over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medicines (2650 people) had been doing so for more than two years.

“Up to now pain relief products containing codeine have been freely available in pharmacies. This has led to some people intentionally and unintentionally misusing these products, which can cause serious health problems,” NPS CEO, Dr Lynn Weekes said.

Taking more than the recommended maximum amount of pain relief containing codeine can result in serious side effects. Overuse or misuse of products containing aspirin or ibuprofen can result in gastric ulcer perforation, or liver toxicity and death from products containing paracetamol.

“Some people who have been using these pain relief products may not even realise they contain codeine. This is why it's important to get to know the active ingredient in any medicine you take and ensure it's the most suitable product for you by talking to your doctor or pharmacist.”

Dr Weekes said changes to the availability of codeine will help health professionals – particularly pharmacists – identify patients who require more support to use pain relief medicines safely and effectively. In turn this will lead to improved outcomes for people experiencing pain.

Talk to your pharmacist about your medicines or call the [NPS Medicines Line](tel:1300888763) on 1300 888 763 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm EST) for the cost of a local call (mobiles may cost more).

For more information about codeine go to www.nps.org.au/news_and_media/position_statements/codeine

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