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## Codeine should not be routinely prescribed for breast feeding mothers

**During lactation analgesics such as paracetamol, ibuprofen or naproxen (unless contraindicated) should preferably be used and codeine only considered as a third line analgesic.**

Use of codeine by breastfeeding mothers, if necessary, should be at the lowest effective dose, for the shortest possible duration and the mother made aware that she should cease the drug and seek medical advice, if she notices side effects in her baby such as:

- Lethargy
- Poor Feeding
- Drowsiness
- Bradycardia
- Breathing Problems

If adverse effects develop in breastfeeding infants the possibility of opioid toxicity should be considered, regardless of maternal dose. Codeine should be replaced by a suitable non-opioid analgesic. Breastfeeding should not be interrupted unless the symptoms are extreme e.g. necessitating admission, and then only for the shortest duration possible in line with NICE recommendations (NICE Maternal and Child Nutrition Recommendation 15; [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk) PH11 March 2008)

This recommendation follows a single adverse event report from Canada, where a breastfed baby died at 12 days of age. At post mortem he was found to have very high levels of morphine in his blood because his mother had multiple copies of the gene which metabolises codeine into morphine and was taking compound codeine analgesics for episiotomy pain. The mother had reported side effects of constipation and somnolence in herself. She had sought medical help on several occasions prior to the baby's death as he was lethargic and had intermittent periods of difficulty in breastfeeding.

Codeine combinations have in the past formed the mainstay of analgesic use, particularly in the early postpartum period. The genotype producing ultra rapid metabolism is rare but is impossible to identify without genetic testing.

#### References:

- <http://www.nelm.nhs.uk/Record%20Viewing/viewRecord.aspx?id=579561>
- Koren G et al. Pharmacogenetics of morphine poisoning in a breastfed neonate of a codeine-prescribed mother. Lancet 2006 Aug 19;368(9536):704. [www.Motherisk.org](http://www.Motherisk.org)

To find your nearest Breastfeeding Supporter call the **Supporterline 0844 412 4664, Drugline 0844 412 4665**

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