

Tramadol use in children

Tramadol has been used effectively in children for over 25 years. In June 2020 Medsafe (NZ's regulatory body for medicines) updated prescribers that the overseas companies advise that tramadol should not be used in:

- Children under 12 years
- Children under 18 years for management of pain after removal of tonsils.

This is because there are people who are described as “ultra-fast metabolisers” who break down the tramadol to its active forms much quicker. This means they are more likely to experience side effects including drowsiness and slowing of breathing which in a small number of cases worldwide has led to the death of a child.

Despite this, tramadol should still be considered as an option for pain management. Tramadol should be;

- limited to treat acute pain
- considered for use when paracetamol and/or ibuprofen have not been effective in managing pain
- started at low doses

As this medication is unlicensed in NZ for use in children, written informed consent should be given by parents before use.

Medicine information

Generic name: tramadol

Brand names: arrow-tramadol, Tramal

Tramadol is available in capsules, liquid or drops, but not all of these forms are funded.

What is tramadol?

Tramadol is a pain killer known as a weak opioid. It acts on the brain and nervous system to lessen the way pain is felt.

When should the medication start working?

Your child should start to feel less pain within 30 minutes of the medicine being given. If you are worried about whether it is helping, contact your doctor.

What if I forget to give a dose?

If your child is in pain, give the missed dose as soon as you remember. You must wait at least 4 hours before giving more tramadol.

What if I give too much?

If you think you may have given your child too much tramadol. Contact your doctor or the NZ national poisons centre (0800 764 766 or 0800 POISON) or take your child to hospital.

Take the medicine container or packaging with you, even if it is empty. This will be useful for your doctor.

What are the possible side effects?

We use medicines to make our children better, but sometimes they have other effects that we don't want (side effects).

Side-effects you **MUST** do something about

- If your child has an irregular or fast heartbeat (they may say their heart feels fluttery or is racing), or their breathing becomes irregular, contact your doctor or take your child to the hospital straight away.
- If your child has hallucinations (sees things that aren't there), contact your doctor straight away.
- If your child is very drowsy or has slow breathing, contact your doctor or take your child to the hospital straight away.

Other side-effects you need to know about

- Your child may feel sick (nausea) or be sick (vomit). Giving the medicine with food or milk may help. If vomiting is severe or you are worried, contact your doctor.
- Your child may be constipated (difficulty doing a poo) or have diarrhoea (watery poo).
- Your child may have a dry mouth. Eating citrus fruit (e.g oranges) and taking sips of water may help
- Your child may be sweaty, sleepy (drowsy), have a headache, feel dizzy or have pins and needles.
- Your child may have changes in mood or have difficulty getting to sleep.

There may, sometimes, be other side effects that are not listed above. If you notice anything unusual and are concerned, contact your doctor.

What if my child is sick? (vomits)

- If your child is sick less than 30 minutes after having the tramadol, you should try and give a different pain relief (like paracetamol) until the next normal dose of tramadol is due. This is to prevent the side effects of a large dose of tramadol if more is given.
- If your child is sick more than 30 minutes after having a dose you do not need to give them another dose or more pain relief. Wait until the next normal dose is due.

Can other medications be given at the same time as tramadol?

You can give your child medication that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless your doctor has told you not to.

Tramadol should not be taken with some medicines that you get on prescription. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about other medicines your child is taking before giving tramadol. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.

Where should I keep this medicine?

Store the medication in a cupboard, away from heat and direct sunlight.

Make sure that children cannot see or reach the medicine.

Keep the medicine in the container it came in.

Who to contact for more information

Your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will be able to give you more information about tramadol and other medications to treat pain. You can also get useful information from:

Kidshealth

<http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/childrens-pain-facts>

<http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/understanding-pain-video>