

Oral Medication Guidelines – Pain management

Description

In general, over-the-counter (OTC) pain medication or topical ophthalmic drugs (such as cyclopentolate) will be sufficient to ease discomfort in patients under the care of an optometrist. However, non-narcotic oral pain relief, such as aspirin, nefopam hydrochloride (Acupan), and paracetamol, or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents (NSAIDs, e.g. ibuprofen and diclofenac), may at times be necessary to reduce ocular pain.

Significance

Many ocular conditions are associated with some degree of pain, and pain relief can have a significant impact on a patient's functional ability, for example returning to work. Before initiating therapy, it is essential to assess the following:

1. Medical history – pregnancy/breast-feeding, alcohol use, antidepressants, haematological disease, kidney/liver failure
2. Drug history – including OTC and naturopathic/herbal remedies
3. Allergy history – rash, anaphylaxis
4. Drug reactions – nausea, vomiting, gastrointestinal bleeding.

Indications

Indications that require temporary pain management may include corneal abrasion, foreign body removal, trauma, and co-management with an ophthalmologist after ocular surgery.

Signs

It is imperative to diagnose the cause of pain before beginning any form of pain management therapy. The nature of pain, as well as its severity and location, should also be assessed before initiating treatment.

Topical treatment

The advantage of topical therapy is that it can reach superficial tissues (e.g., episclera) in higher concentration and there are fewer side effects. In many cases topical agents, such as topical NSAIDs and/or cycloplegia, will be adequate.

- a. **NSAIDs:** Can reduce inflammation, maintain pupil dilation, and induce analgesic effects without the sight-threatening effects of topical steroids. NSAIDs do not appear to result in corneal epithelial damage but patients often note a burning sensation on instillation (Aragona *et.al.*, 2000; Waterbury, 1987). Ketorolac (Acular) has been shown to have potent analgesic activity with moderate anti-inflammatory effects (Buckley & Brogden, 1990). In cases of corneal abrasion, ketorolac has been shown to be more effective for the management of pain than control drops (vehicle) (Kaiser & Pineda, 1997).

Although side effects of topical NSAIDs are uncommon, their use has been associated with corneal signs such as punctate epitheliopathy, immune rings, persistent epithelial defects, and corneal melting. Therefore, careful monitoring of patients is required (Lin *et.al.*, 2000).

- b. **Cycloplegics:** Ocular pain often accompanies intraocular inflammation. It is common for patients with significant corneal abrasions or a corneal foreign body to develop a mild iritis. In these cases, cycloplegia can be an effective form of pain management by temporarily inducing pupillary dilation and paralysing the ciliary muscle. Note: use of cycloplegia can significantly impair visual function for driving/work tasks.
- c. **Topical corticosteroids:** Use is limited to the cessation of ocular inflammation, which will reduce the pain. However, before steroid therapy is initiated, it is important to diagnose the cause of pain and treat accordingly.
- d. **Bandage contact lens:** In cases of a large corneal abrasion or severe recurrent corneal erosion syndrome (RCES), a bandage contact lens may also provide significant pain relief, in combination with prophylactic, preservative-free, antibiotic cover.

Topical ocular anaesthetics should never be used to manage ocular discomfort due to their toxicity to the corneal epithelium, which will delay wound healing (Bisla & Tinelian, 1992), and could result in corneal perforation with prolonged use.

Oral treatment

- a. **Aspirin:** exerts its anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and anti-pyretic effects via inhibition of the enzyme cyclo-oxygenase (COX). In low doses (75 to 150 mg once daily), it is used for blood clot prevention, however, in higher doses (for example 300 mg every 4 to 6 hours) it can be an effective analgesic agent.

Aspirin is contraindicated in children under 16 years and in patients with a history of aspirin allergy, gastrointestinal ulcers, blood-thinning medication (e.g., warfarin), and in pregnancy as there is evidence of risk to the foetus. Aspirin should be avoided in patients with severe hepatic

impairment as there is increased risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. It should be used with caution in patients with renal impairment.

Adverse reactions can include bronchospasm, asthma, gastrointestinal bleeding, renal damage, liver toxicity, dizziness, tinnitus, impaired hearing, and severe skin reactions. Patients should be counselled to avoid alcohol and herbal products while using aspirin.

- b. Paracetamol (acetaminophen):** When used as directed is a generally safe drug, however, it does have a narrow therapeutic range and doses higher than recommended entail a risk of serious, irreversible liver damage. Therefore, paracetamol is contraindicated in patients with hepatic failure or decompensated active liver disease. It also has the potential for serious harm from accidental or deliberate overdose (Woodcock, 2009), and a careful medical history is required to check those other medications being taken concurrently do not contain paracetamol. The recommended dose of paracetamol for mild to moderate pain is 500 to 1000 mg every 4 to 6 hours, with a maximum daily dose of 4 g (8 tablets) per day.

Paracetamol should also be used with caution in patients with alcoholism, anorexia, and bulimia, and in patients with chronic malnutrition and dehydration (e.g., from excessive vomiting), as there is increased risk of toxicity (Ferner *et.al.*, 2011). Paracetamol is probably safe to use in pregnancy although it is always best to avoid any treatment in the first trimester at least.

Adverse events are very rare although thrombocytopenia, anaphylaxis, Steven Johnson Syndrome, bronchospasm, and hepatic dysfunction have been reported. The anticoagulant effect of warfarin and other coumarins may be increased by the regular daily use of paracetamol with increased risk of bleeding. However, no effect in bleeding from short-term use has been reported.

- c. Nefopam hydrochloride (Acupan):** Is a non-narcotic analgesic that provides comparable pain relief to aspirin and paracetamol. Although structurally related to antihistamines, it has no anti-inflammatory properties (Heel *et.al.*, 1980). Nefopam hydrochloride dosing for pain relief is generally 60 mg (lower in elderly) three times per day.

Nefopam is contraindicated in patients with convulsive disorders and those who have taken antidepressant monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) within the previous 14 days, as it can cause significant elevations in blood pressure due to sympathomimetic activity. It should be used with caution in the elderly, and patients at risk of angle-closure, urinary retention, or impaired liver or kidney function (Vet, 2007). Nefopam should not be given to patients under 12 years of age, as its safety and efficacy have not been established in children.

The most common side effects are sweating and nausea, which occur in 10 to 30% of patients (Heel *et.al.*, 1980).

- d. **Ibuprofen:** Is a NSAID with analgesic and antipyretic properties and is indicated for the relief of chronic and/or acute pain with an inflammatory component. NSAIDs inhibit cyclo-oxygenase, reducing the production of prostaglandins. The standard dose of ibuprofen for pain relief is 200 to 400 mg, 3 to 4 times per day (with a maximum recommended dose of 2400 mg per day. Patients should be advised to take this medication with or just after food.

Ibuprofen may inhibit the effects of low-dose aspirin, so should be used with caution in patients with cardiovascular disease or known cardiovascular risk factors. It is also contraindicated in patients with known hypersensitivity to ibuprofen, aspirin or other NSAIDs; patients with a history of GI bleeding or perforation; patients with Crohn's disease, recurrent peptic ulceration, or GI haemorrhage; patients with severe heart, liver or renal failure; patients with asthma; and when trying to conceive or during pregnancy, particularly during the third trimester. Long-term use of NSAIDs has been associated with reduced female fertility, which is reversible on treatment cessation.

Ibuprofen appears to be well tolerated in elderly patients, but as many elderly patients will have some degree of renal impairment, the full adult dosage should be used with caution.

The most common adverse effects are GI upset with nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and pain; however, these are less likely to occur in lower doses. Other side effects include fluid retention, dizziness, headache, tinnitus, rash, decreased appetite and fatigue.

- e. **Diclofenac (Voltaren):** Is a NSAID which has a pronounced analgesic effect with a rapid onset of action. For pain relief, the typical dose of diclofenac is 50 mg initially, with an additional 25 to 50 mg every eight hours if required. The maximum daily dose is 150 mg.

Contraindications and precautions are like other NSAIDs, including an increased risk of cardio-thrombotic events, onset of hypertension or worsening of pre-existing hypertension, gastrointestinal events, and severe skin reactions.

Diclofenac is not recommended for use in patients with asthma or during pregnancy, particularly during the final trimester where NSAIDs may lead to uterine inertia. Diclofenac is not recommended for use in children younger than 14 years of age.

Review

As all pain-relief medication can have serious side effects, regular review is necessary. The time frame for review will depend on the condition being treated. A realistic goal is to reduce pain as quickly

possible with minimum adverse effects. For ocular pain the process is usually acute, and pain relief should be required for only 24 to 48 hours. Medications for pain relief should never be prescribed for more than 72 hours, and up-to-date dosage regimens and contraindications should always be checked in the drug formulary.

Referral criteria

Pain associated with inflammatory conditions, such as preseptal cellulitis and scleritis, should always be referred for urgent ophthalmological consultation as these conditions require systemic management.

In cases of pain that are not improving after 2 days, or if the underlying cause is unclear, or the pain is out of proportion with the current diagnosis, the patient should be referred for further medical evaluation.

Informed consent

As with all healthcare interventions, the therapeutic optometrist is responsible for ensuring that the patient has been advised of the possible benefits and risks associated with the prescription medication, in order that the patient can make an informed decision and provide consent to the treatment plan.

Controlled drugs

Controlled drugs are those specified under the Schedules to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 and are more tightly controlled than prescribing of other medicines reflecting the need to restrict access to them and minimise misuse. Prescribing of controlled drugs is restricted to medical practitioners, nurse practitioners, dentists, midwives, designated prescriber nurses and pharmacists, and veterinarians (s2(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977).

To be clear, there are no circumstances under which an optometrist may prescribe a controlled drug. To do so would be illegal under New Zealand law and could result in prosecution and disciplinary action.

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