

## Changes to Codeine Availability

From 1 February you will no longer be able to get products containing codeine over the counter in the pharmacy. Why is this important?

### What is Codeine?

- Codeine is a mild opioid, in the same family as morphine.
- It is used to treat mild to moderate pain, cough and sometimes diarrhoea.

### What is Codeine in?

- Codeine is in a range of pain medications you can buy over the counter in the pharmacy such as nurofen plus, pandeine and mersydol. It is also in a number of cough mixtures.
- Codeine is found in both adult and children's medications.

### What will Happen on 1 February?

- From 1 February you will not longer be able to buy products containing codeine over the counter in the pharmacy – you will need a prescription.

### Why is this Happening?

- Some people are taking large amounts of codeine products – a packet or more a day. This may be to control back pain or headache or for a constant hacking cough.
- You can develop an addiction to codeine – this can occur from taking as little as one or two tablets every day.

### How do You Know if You're Addicted to Codeine?

- If you've been taking several tablets containing codeine every day for some time, you are probably addicted.
- Many people will not be aware they are addicted until they stop taking the medication and suffer withdrawal symptoms.
- Some people may have tried to stop taking codeine and not recognised headaches, cramps and body aches and pain as withdrawal symptoms.

### What are the Withdrawal Symptoms?

- Mild symptoms are headaches, nausea, sweating and diarrhoea.
- More severe symptoms include vomiting, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, anxiety and agitation and hallucinations. Severe withdrawal symptoms can be life threatening and require medical intervention.
- You will not know if you're going to have mild or severe withdrawal symptoms until you start the process so medical advice and possibly supervision is important.

### What Should You Do Now?

- If you take a codeine product daily, see your doctor for a program to stop taking the product.
- Investigate other things for pain relief: acupuncture, massage or physiotherapy.
- Exercise often helps pain conditions but consult an expert before starting – some things are not recommended for certain conditions (e.g. people with fibromyalgia shouldn't do yoga!).
- While an optimistic outlook doesn't change pain, it helps you cope with it so looking for the good things in life, laughing and having pleasurable experiences can make the pain feel less severe.
- Don't stock pile products – it's only putting off the inevitable.