

Rationale

Toothache can come and go or be constant. Eating or drinking can make the pain worse, particularly if the food or drink is hot or cold. Mild toothache in adults can also be treated with over the counter painkillers whilst awaiting a dental appointment for further investigation.

Recommendations for clinicians

- Provide the patient with a 'non-prescription' sheet or a patient information leaflet to promote education about self-limiting conditions suitable for self-care when appropriate.
- Advise patients of safe and effective self-care measures:
 - Rinse mouth with salt water (not suitable for children) and avoid smoking as it worsens dental problems
 - Eat soft foods, like yoghurt or scrambled eggs, avoid chewing with the sore tooth and avoid very hot or very cold foods
 - Take painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen or pain relieving gels
- Advise patients to seek dental attention in the following circumstances:
 - If toothache lasts more than 2 days or does not go away when you take painkillers
 - If patient has a toothache with high temperature, pain when they bite, red gums, or bad taste in their mouth
 - If cheek or jaws are swollen during toothache
- Patients should go to A&E in the following circumstances:
 - Area around eye or neck is swollen or swelling in mouth or neck is making it difficult for them to breathe, swallow or speak

Example of products available to buy over the counter*

Paracetamol (tablets) - **Not licensed for under 10 years (25p-£3 for 16 tablets/capsules); suspension – Not licensed for under 2 months (£2.50-£4.50 for 100ml)**
Ibuprofen (tablets) – **Not licensed under the age of 12 years (35p-£4.00 for 16 tablets/capsules); suspension – Not licensed for under 3 months (£2.50-£4.00 for 100ml)**

For further information see Self-care forum <http://www.selfcareforum.org/>, NHS UK <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/>, Patient UK <https://patient.info/>

*Prices correct at time of writing and are subject to change

