

# Analgesic

An analgesic, or painkiller, is any member of the group of [drugs](#) used to achieve [analgesia](#).

The word analgesic derives from Greek ἀν-, “without”, and ἄλγος, “pain”.

## Types

Three types of [pain medication](#)

### 1. [Nonopioid analgesic](#)

a) [Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug](#): [aspirin](#), [ibuprofen](#), [acetaminophen](#)

### 2. [Opioids](#)

a) agonists

b) partial agonists

c) mixed agonists/antagonists.

3. drugs that are not strictly analgesics, but which act as adjuvants when added to any of the above: tricyclic antidepressants, anticonvulsants, caffeine, hydroxyzine, corticosteroids.

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[Opiates](#) and [acetaminophen](#) are preferred [analgesic](#) agents, and [gabapentin](#) is a contextual third choice, in neurocritically ill patients. Other agents are rarely prescribed. The discordance in physician self-reports and objective audits suggest that pain management optimization studies are warranted.<sup>1)</sup>

Analgesic drugs act in various ways on the peripheral and central nervous systems. They are distinct from anesthetics, which reversibly eliminate sensation, and include [paracetamol](#) (known in the US as acetaminophen or simply APAP), the [Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs](#) (NSAIDs) such as the salicylates, and opioid drugs such as morphine and oxycodone.

In choosing analgesics, the severity and response to other medication determines the choice of agent; the World Health Organization (WHO) pain ladder specifies mild analgesics as its first step.

Analgesic choice is also determined by the type of pain: For neuropathic pain, traditional analgesics are less effective, and there is often benefit from classes of drugs that are not normally considered analgesics, such as tricyclic antidepressants and anticonvulsants.

<sup>1)</sup>

Zeiler FA, AlSubaie F, Zeiler K, Teitelbaum J, Bernard F, Skrobik Y. Analgesia in Neurocritical Care: An International Survey and Practice Audit. Crit Care Med. 2016 Mar 15. [Epub ahead of print] PubMed PMID: 26983164.

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