

Overdose of paracetamol can be fatal

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If you have the habit of popping down paracetamol every time you suffer from cold, fever or flu, beware. The overdose of this most popular family drug can be fatal to the patients habitual of consuming it daily, a study has revealed.

Conducted by British researchers, the study says that the risk of dying from liver failure due to accidental overdose is higher than deliberate suicide attempts. "The safest thing to do is monitor how much you're taking and do not exceed eight 500mg tablets or 4 gram for an adult in a day," says the study which is published in the recent edition of *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*.

Paracetamol is one of the most widely used treatments for fevers and pain from conditions including headaches, back problems,



toothaches, period pain, and flu. It has been around for more than 50 years and is safe when used at correct doses, even in pregnancy.

The study conducted by the team led by Kenneth Simpson, a researcher at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary who analysed data of 663 patients admitted between 1992 and 2008 with liver

damage caused by paracetamol. The experts found 161 people with an average age of 40 had taken a staggered overdose, usually to relieve stomach or back pain, headache and toothache, two out of five died from liver failure - a higher fatality rate than recorded for deliberate overdosing.

"The staggered overdoses can occur when people have pain and repeatedly take a little more paracetamol than they should, they don't keep track of how much they've consumed over a few days," Simpson said.

Normal quantities of the drug are broken down harmlessly by the body but excessive amounts can accumulate in the liver, leading to irreversible damage.

While commenting on the findings, Dr Randeep Guleria, professor and head of Department of Pulmonary Medicine in premier health institute, AIIMS said,

paracetamol had so far been considered the safest medicine to treat many ailments.

"But now in the last one year, various studies have shown that higher dose or taken regularly can lead to various toxicities including damage to lungs which can cause death."

In fact, India has already put a cap on the prescription formulations of paracetamol combo drugs — it should not exceed 325 mg in each tablet or capsule with an aim to prevent liver damage of a patient due to its overuse.

Presently the drug - chemical ly known as Acetaminophen - is sold by major brand manufacturers in the strength of 500 mg over-the-counter. The firms have been given a three-year period to phase out the existing lot of higher-dose paracetamol products from the market to shift to the new norms.

Clinical Research.