

Pain relief a killer

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IT'S the most common painkiller in medicine cupboards, but paracetamol poisons 8000 Australians a year.

More than 150 people a week are admitted to hospital with paracetamol poisoning, and experts say the problem is on the rise.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration says approximately 8000 patients per year are treated for deliberately tak-

ing a paracetamol overdose, but usually without any suicidal intent.

A Monash University emergency medicine expert, Professor Andis Graudins, warned that large packs of modified-release paracetamol, which is used to control arthritis, were putting patients at a greater risk of a larger overdose.

The problem with modified release doses was that initial blood tests might record non-toxic levels of paracetamol, Prof Graudins said.

In a paper published in the journal *Emergency Medicine Australasia*, he said this made it essential to retest patients after four hours, to see if the concentration had increased.

Another problem is that this, and other types of paracetamol, are available in very large pack sizes of 96-100 pills. He has called for authorities to consider restricting pack sizes.

Supermarkets were last year banned from selling large packs of the painkiller.

Paracetamol is the pill most commonly used in cases of

self-harm, because it is easily obtainable over the counter.

"It can kill if you take enough and you don't get the appropriate medical treatment," Prof Graudins said.

Unless patients are given an antidote within eight hours of an overdose they risk liver inflammation and can experience liver failure.

Death can take up to five days and be extremely painful as the liver and kidneys fail.

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