



Visit your doctor to talk about your health and the medicines you may need. This factsheet will give you information about a type of medicine. You will learn what questions you should ask your doctor about this medicine. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is very important for your health.

Medicines for Pain: From Osteoarthritis to Muscle Pain

Do you take pain medicines to treat headaches, migraines, back aches, and even joint pain? Then this factsheet is for you. Many people take medicines like *Advil*, *Motrin*, and *Aleve* to relieve their pain. This group of medicines is called **Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)**.



What are NSAID medicines and who needs them?

NSAIDs are medicines that help treat fever and mild pain caused by many different health problems. Some people who may need to use these types of medicine are:

- **People with osteoarthritis.** Osteoarthritis happens when the cartilage of the joint wears down and the bones start rubbing against each other. It can cause pain, inflammation, and stiffness of the joints.
- **People with rheumatoid arthritis.** This disease happens when the immune system attacks healthy areas of the joints causing pain, redness, and swelling.
- **People with back pain,** headaches, muscle pain, menstrual period cramps, and sprains.

NSAIDs are usually in the form of pills. You need a doctor's prescription to buy some NSAIDs. Others can be bought without a prescription. You can get NSAIDs as brand-name medicines or as generic medicines.



In the United States, "generic" medicines are just as good as brand-name medicines. They are very safe and work just like the brand-name medicine, and they cost a lot less money. Ask your doctor if you can get a generic medicine instead of a brand-name

Brand-Name NSAIDs	Generic NSAIDs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Aspirin, Bayer, Bufferin</i>• <i>Advil, Motrin IB</i>• <i>Aleve, Anaprox, Naprosyn</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Acetylated salicylates</i>• <i>Ibuprofen</i>• <i>Naproxen</i>



Can NSAIDs affect your health?

NSAIDs can be dangerous when you take them too often or in high doses. NSAIDs can cause serious side effects, like stomach ulcers, bleeding in your stomach and intestines, problems with your kidneys, heart attacks, and strokes.

You should **NOT** take an NSAID if...

- you have stomach ulcers, or bleeding;
- you have had a heart attack, a stroke, or a mini- stroke;
- you have had a bypass surgery;
- your blood pressure is high;
- you take aspirin to protect your heart;
- you have kidney problems; or
- you are between the 7th and the 9th month of your pregnancy.

How can I tell if my stomach is bleeding or if I have an ulcer?

You will feel a burning sensation in your stomach, or when you go to the bathroom, your feces (or bowel movement) can be very dark, dry or have blood.

If your doctor prescribes you an NSAID, tell him/her what other medicines you are currently taking. Sometimes mixing an NSAID with other medicines can cause health problems.



How can you take these medicines in a safe way?

Here are some recommendations:

For common pain that goes away after a short time:

1 You can take acetaminophen (name-brand *Tylenol*) first, if you do not drink too much alcohol. Read and follow the instructions on the label carefully.



2 If acetaminophen does not help and your pain is mild or does not happen all the time, try an over-the-counter NSAID like *ibuprofen (Advil)* or *naproxen (Aleve)*. You should not take them for longer than 10 days without talking to your doctor.

For pain that needs treatment for a long time:

1 If you take an *NSAID* several times a week because you have pain that does not go away, stiffness in your bones, or for soreness in your muscles after exercise, then talk to your doctor before taking an NSAID frequently. He or she may give you other ideas on how to treat your pain.

2 If you need to take an NSAID frequently to treat a condition for a long time like osteoarthritis, talk to your doctor so that he can prescribe you an *NSAID*. This is so your doctor can look after any problems that this medicine may cause for your stomach, heart, or kidneys.

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs evaluated the different NSAIDs by comparing how well they work, how safe they are, and how much they cost. *Consumer Reports* recommends these generic medicines as the best NSAIDs:

- **Ibuprofen**
- **Naproxen**

Stores like Sam's Club, Target, and Walmart have discount generic medicine programs. If you buy your generic medicines using these programs, a month's supply may cost you as little as \$4. Your supply for 3 months may cost you only \$10.

To learn more about this topic go to:

<http://www.consumerreports.org/health/best-buy-drugs/nsaids.htm>



How to Get the Best Price for Your Medicines

- **Ask for a generic:** Tell your pharmacist you want a generic medicine instead of the brand-name. You will pay less for a generic. Not all brand-name medicines have a generic, but many do.
- **Compare prices:** Call or visit three different pharmacies. Give them the name of the medicine and ask how much it costs. Ask if they have a drug discount program that can help you pay less for your medicine. Buy your medicine from the pharmacy that gives you the cheapest price.
- **Sign up for patient assistance programs:** Most companies that make medicines have programs that help people that don't have a lot of money and do not have insurance to get brand-name medicines for free or at a low cost. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance can help you find a program: www.pparx.org or 1-888-477-2669.

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