
Treatment Information

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs

There are lots of different non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) available. They are used to reduce the stiffness and inflammation in your joints but do not have any influence on the progress of rheumatic diseases. This means that they are useful but optional; it is reasonable to stop taking your anti-inflammatory tablets if your arthritis is well controlled and then restart them if your joints become more painful. But please seek advice from your Rheumatology Practitioner (RP) or doctor. They are often given in addition to painkillers.

Which are the most effective? There are many to choose from and it is not possible to predict which will work best for you. This means that you may have to try several before you find the most effective one for you. Some NSAID's such as aspirin and Ibuprofen are available without prescription. It is unwise to take more than one type of NSAID at a time. Always ask the pharmacist what is in the medication that you buy and whether it will upset you.

How do I take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs? Some anti-inflammatories only work for a short time and need to be taken 3-4 times a day. Others are produced in a slow-release form and only need to be taken once or twice a day. They are usually taken by mouth as tablets or capsules however, some anti-inflammatories can also be taken as suppositories (capsules which are placed in your back passage).

Anti-inflammatory drugs can interfere with the protective lining of your stomach, causing indigestion and in extreme cases, stomach ulcers. For this reason you should always take anti-inflammatory tablets with food or a glass of milk which will help to protect your stomach. If you have a history of stomach problems or if you have asthma or take warfarin -discuss this with your doctor or RP. Sometimes NSAID's can be combined with another tablet to protect the stomach against side effects.

Are there any side effects? As with all medication some people may experience side effects. These may include:

- indigestion
- diarrhea
- fluid retention
- headaches
- lightheadedness
- Swollen ankles
- rashes
- sensitivity of skin to sunlight

Important - If you pass black stools or vomit blood seek urgent medical advice.

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What tests will I have? There are no routine blood tests needed for people taking anti-inflammatory tablets although you may be having regular blood tests because of some of your other medication.

Additional information You should avoid aspirin based medications unless your doctor has prescribed them because these can also irritate your stomach.

Do NSAID'S affect fertility or pregnancy? They decrease fertility and are generally not recommended during pregnancy. If you are planning a family or become pregnant or are breast feeding you should discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible.

May I drink alcohol whilst taking NSAID's? Yes in moderation, although alcohol and NSAID's can both upset the stomach

NSAID creams and Gels

These can often help and are available on prescription or from the chemist. They can be applied to painful joints. They should be rubbed in completely and your hands should be washed after use. Do not apply to damaged skin and only use on the external surface of the body.

If you are already taking NSAID's and feel that the creams or gels may be of benefit - please discuss this with your doctor or RP before trying.

Recent developments

You may be prescribed a different type of anti-inflammatory - termed a Cox II selective inhibitor. These drugs include:

Meloxicam (Mobic)

Etodolac (Lodine)

Celecoxib (Celebrex)

These drugs have a similar anti-inflammatory action and have been developed to reduce the incidence of gastric side effects and are therefore used in patients at 'high risk' of developing such side effects. However, as with all types of anti-inflammatory drugs there is still a potential for side effects, so therefore use only as directed by your doctor and report any side effects.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions or need advice about your treatment phone the Rheumatology Advice line on

01202 442849.

www.poole.nhs.uk/our_services/rheumatology.asp

Rheumatology department Patient Information

For further health-related information, please contact:

The Health Information & Resource Centre

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Rheumatology Practitioners

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We can supply this information in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. A member of staff will be happy to discuss this with you. Please call PALS on 01202 448499 or the Health Information Centre on 01202 448003 for further advice