

Why Has My Doctor Recommended Aleve or Motrin Instead of Tylenol?



When you consult your doctor about a recent injury, he or she may recommend an anti-inflammatory drug to decrease swelling and inflammation, as well as to relieve pain. Acetaminophen (marketed as Tylenol) only relieves pain. Certain other over-the-counter products, such as naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn) and ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), **reduce inflammation and fever** in addition to relieving pain. Drugs of this class are called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

NSAIDs are among the **most prescribed and safest medications** for treating both recent injuries and chronic conditions such as arthritis. They work by blocking an enzyme, called cyclooxygenase (COX), that the body produces when structures become injured or inflamed. This enzyme also provides special protection against harsh digestive juices in the stomach.

Unfortunately, NSAIDs can have side effects. Because NSAIDs block the production of COX, they can cause stomach upset, interfere with kidney function, reduce blood clotting and lead to stomach ulcers and bleeding. NSAIDs can also interfere with other medications you may be taking and could make it unsafe for you to undergo certain medical procedures. Consuming alcohol with these medications adds an additional risk of kidney damage.

A newer class of NSAIDs, COX-2 inhibitors, **reduces the risk of stomach upset and does not impair blood clotting**, making them safer for patients taking anticoagulant medications. However, recent studies have suggested an **increased risk of heart attack and stroke** among people taking COX-2 inhibitors. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has pulled several of these drugs from the market while further research is done. Most of the significant reactions were associated with long-term use; thus, some physicians may recommend using these drugs for a short period of time (weeks, not months).

NSAIDs are available over-the-counter and by prescription. If you are taking any NSAID (including aspirin), speak to your doctor about the dosage and any other medications you are taking. Limit the amount of alcohol you consume when taking any anti-inflammatory medication. NSAIDs can provide effective relief from inflammation and pain due to your injury and are beneficial during physical therapy. Talking with your doctor and monitoring your medications closely will help you to remain healthy and active.