

WELLNESSMONTHLY

Choosing the Right Remedy for Temporary Pain | September 2022



September is Pain Awareness Month. While this national campaign focuses on chronic pain, it also draws attention to effective ways to manage temporary pain.

Choosing the Right Remedy for Temporary Pain

You may reach for an over-the-counter (OTC) medication without thinking much about it if you have aches and pains, sunburn, menstrual cramps, a headache, minor injury or just had a medical procedure. OTC pain relievers are widely available without the need for a doctor's prescription.

OTC Pain Relief

People experience pain in different ways, and pain medications are not all the same. It's important to carefully read and follow directions for recommended use, dosage, possible side effects (such as drowsiness) and the expiration date before taking any kind of drug. A pain reliever in your medicine cabinet may have outlived its effectiveness or not be exactly what you need.

It's best to check with your doctor or a pharmacist to make sure you are taking an OTC pain reliever correctly and safely. Combining a pain reliever with other OTC or prescription medications can exceed the recommended daily dosage or create health risks due to drug interactions.

Pain Reliever Types

Commonly used types of OTC pain relievers are acetaminophen and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Most OTC analgesic drugs are available in tablet, caplet, gel cap and liquid forms.

Acetaminophen is the main ingredient in Tylenol and many other OTC and prescription products. It helps relieve fever, headaches and body aches but does not target inflammation. Aspirin and NSAIDs with ibuprofen (e.g., Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (e.g., Aleve) help relieve fever, pain and swelling. When taken as directed for no more than 10 days, OTC pain relievers are considered safe for most people. Aspirin should not be given to children.

Some products combine acetaminophen and aspirin (e.g., Excedrin, Vanquish) and may also contain caffeine. Acetaminophen affects parts of the brain that receive pain messages and control body temperature. Aspirin and NSAIDs reduce the level of prostaglandins in the body. Prostaglandins are lipid compounds that cause inflammation at the site of tissue damage or infection. Swelling, pain and fever are indicators that the body is attempting to protect itself.

Acetaminophen and NSAIDs may be prescribed by a doctor at a higher than OTC dose. If a person's physical discomfort is work-related, the higher dose is considered medical treatment in the workers' compensation system.

Reminders

- When an OTC drug is just taken now and then for pain, side effects are less likely to occur.
- Health risks increase when pain relievers are taken in combination with other drugs or at high doses.
- Pain relievers can damage the stomach, liver or kidneys with long-term use.
- Alcohol and pain relievers are a dangerous combination, especially for heavy drinkers.
- Some OTC pain relievers may interact with blood pressure medications or increase blood pressure in people not previously diagnosed with hypertension.
- Older adults should use extra caution when taking OTC pain relievers because they are more likely to develop side effects.
- While taking pain medication, moderate exercise is safe as tolerated and recommended.

Marijuana

Medical and recreational marijuana is increasingly available in the U.S. A growing number of people use it to relieve pain, control muscle spasms, nausea and vomiting, or treat anxiety, among other ailments. However, it can affect thinking and memory and increase accident risk; smoking marijuana may harm the lungs. A medical professional can advise you about the use of cannabis products to manage pain.

Substance Alternatives

There are other ways to deal with pain beside consuming substances. For example, if you have a strain or sprain, you might use the RICE method for a few days after onset:

- **Rest** to prevent overuse of an injured body part while it heals

- **Ice** applied as directed to the affected area to reduce pain (not directly on skin)
- **Compression** with an elastic wrap to help relieve swelling
- **Elevation** of an injured body part for swelling and discomfort

For certain types of musculoskeletal complaints, MICE – substituting rest with movement – may be recommended. A reasonable amount of activity during recovery encourages healing. Working safely, walking, swimming and cycling are among recommended activities. Staying active also promotes better quality sleep, which is essential for good health.

Other remedies used to help relieve temporary pain include heat, chiropractic care, acupuncture, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), therapeutic massage, physical therapy, biofeedback, meditation practice, deep breathing, yoga, listening to music and hypnosis. Botox injections may be prescribed to help relieve migraines or nerve compression disorders.

Being aware of your pain tolerance and options for relief will help you cope with temporary discomfort. See a medical provider when pressure on an injured body part cannot be tolerated or symptoms such as pain, swelling or fever do not improve with self-care.

Did You Know?

- *An estimated 50 million Americans live with chronic pain.*
- *Pain may be considered chronic when it persists for at least six months.*
- *Injuries and underlying disorders cause chronic pain, but the cause may be elusive.*
- *Chronic pain can be felt as burning, stabbing, aching, pulsing and many other sensations.*
- *Over time, chronic pain affects the nervous system and becomes a disease in and of itself.*
- *Pain management often requires a multi-disciplinary, multi-modality approach to provide relief.*

Sources: [National Center for Health Statistics](#) and [U.S. Pain Foundation](#)