

Anti-Anti-Inflammatory Medications

by Dr. Daniel Shaye, Chiropractic Physician



If you read my column regularly, you know about anti-inflammatory medication abuse. “Anti” means “against,” so anti-inflammatory drugs fight inflammation (and thus pain)... and arguably, being against abuse of anti-inflammatory

drugs would make me a proponent of “anti-anti-inflammatory abuse.”

Aspirin was once considered a wonder drug... until we realized it causes ulcers. Then came steroids and their cousins, the Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs include Celebrex, Daypro, Feldene, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Nuprin), Lodine, Indocin, Naprosyn, Orudis, Relafen, Toradol, Voltaren, and others. Though NSAID abuse in arthritis patients causes an estimated 16,500 deaths every year,* healthy people suffer in other, less obvious ways. NSAIDs are the most commonly used anti-inflammatories, and acetaminophen (referred to in my article as Tylenol) fights pain through a different mechanism. A recent study* links both to high blood pressure (“hypertension”). The study of 80,020 women age 31-50 who took NSAIDS 22 or more days a month revealed an 86% increased risk of high blood pressure compared to those who avoided the drugs altogether! Tylenol “only” boosted the risk 50%. It bears noting that the NSAID risk did not include aspirin.

Another study took a different angle on NSAID risk. Cox-2 inhibitors, a class of drug that includes Celebrex, may weaken soft tissue. We’ve long known that cortisone injections can do this, but this year 2001 study* showed that rats who used these NSAIDS after injury had 32% lower ligament strength! If this study is extrapolated to the human runner (we are not that unlike rats when running on a treadmill!), consider that a sprain might take **LONGER** to heal if the athlete takes certain NSAIDS. Stated differently: The drugs may help you feel better, and may make re-injury more likely.

Pain is valuable: It’s the body’s way of warning you something’s wrong. Like pain, inflammation has its value. Inflammation is part of the normal healing process. Inflammation brings white blood cells into an area, clearing that area of damaged tissue. We take a risk when we interfere with nature. Is the benefit to your drug worth the risk to liver, kidney, and stomach? If you’re a runner, are the pills worth the risk to ligaments and other tissues? And is there a better way?

So, a summary:

1. Aspirin can damage the GI tract, especially the stomach
2. NSAIDs may cause high blood pressure
3. Like NSAIDs, Acetaminophen (Tylenol) may cause high blood pressure
4. Some NSAIDs may weaken ligaments
5. Ice never, ever destroyed a liver, kidney, or stomach; nor has it caused high blood pressure; nor is it known to weaken tissues.

NSAIDs don’t have some of the problems associated with aspirin... but they caused side effects. The newer NSAIDS didn’t cause the problems the older ones did... but they caused still more, different complications. Beware tomorrow’s wonder-drug, which won’t have the problems of yesterday’s magic bullet but will bring its own costs. “Let thy food be thy medicine” said Hippocrates. Add ice, some good sleep, and smart training, and you’ve got something. Drugs have their place, but be judicious with them.

Until next month... happy running!

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* References available upon request

Do you have a question you’d like answered in this column? Mail your questions c/o Performance Chiropractic, 1307 Jamestown Road, Ste. 103, Williamsburg, VA 23185; or e-mail pchiro@performancechiropractic.com