

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Pain Relief - No Pills

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Is there anybody out there who has not heard the term NSAID? It stands for nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. There are many and they have been around for a long time. Got Motrin or Advil? Got Aleve?

For many doctors the NSAIDs are the pills of choice to treat arthritic pain.

There are drawbacks however, as all have side effects principally on the stomach (gastrointestinal) and increased risk of heart and kidney problems.

What's New For Pain

Prescription patches, gels and lotions. These different drug delivery systems have become popular with patients because the risk of adverse side effects is generally lower.

In this discussion I am talking only about pain relief. There are dozens of other patch medications used for other purposes.

Some patches provide their medication only in the area where they are placed. In others the medication goes through the skin pores into the bloodstream. It travels throughout the body as pill medication does. The medication enters the bloodstream slowly and continuously.

USA Is Behind

I have recently heard that in Europe patients get 25% of their pain relief from patches and creams. In China I learned that it is 50%. In the U.S. the figure is around 10% probably because of our cultural love affair with popping pills.

Voltaren Gel

It is a prescription used for the treatment of osteoarthritic joints. You can measure how much to use and apply it up to 4 times per day to a painful knee, elbow or other joint. It is effective, but it's absorption into the whole body is only 5% of what you get in a daily oral dose.

Flexor Patch

It is a prescription available for the treatment of acute pain due to minor sprains, strains and contusions.

Pennsaid

It is a topical lotion prescription used for knee arthritis. You put ten drops at a time in your hand, then massage into the knee. You get the benefit locally without systemic effects.

Generally Safer

These topical preparations have a benefit locally because you are getting a benefit without bodily side effects; however the makers have to warn patients that the side effects could be the same. If you are at high risk for heart, gastrointestinal or kidney problems it would probably be best to avoid them. For most of us with localized joint or back pain they are very safe. If you hurt all over, the oral drug would be best.

Lidocaine Patch (Lidoderm)

It is a local anesthetic patch which is widely used to treat arthritis pain especially in the back or around large joints. It usually is not used for small joints. You apply it for 12 hours and then remove it for 12 hours.

Fentanyl Patch

It is a morphine like drug used for heavier pain anywhere in the body so is not worn over a particular part. It lasts 72 hours releasing medicine slowly. I am aware of it, but I don't prescribe it because that isn't the type of patient problem I take care of.

OTC

There are innumerable ones called over the counter topicals too many to list here. Bengay is the old standard. I like Theragesic a lot as it seems to help my patients. Others are Icy Hot, Salonpas, China gel and countless others.

I hope this gives you a little background about this expanding area of pain management.

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www.orthopodsurgeon.com opens up for you the office website, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Archive of all previous Argus articles I have written for you, your family and friends.

Please check it out. Do yourself a favor.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush