

# Natural alternatives to NSAIDs

This week I want to share with you an eye-opening article written by David Seaman, DC, that was published in "The American Chiropractor" magazine's June 2006 issue. The topic is natural alternatives to NSAIDs, or Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs. Research has shown that Omega-3 fatty acids and other natural anti-inflammatory agents can take the place of NSAIDs in the long-term care of spinal and joint pain.

The treatment of pain with NSAIDs is big business in the U.S. But unfortunately, it leads to a substantial number of deaths and extraordinary costs to treat NSAID-related complications. Consider the following facts about NSAID use:

- More than 70 million NSAID prescriptions are filled each year in US;
- More than 30 billion over the counter NSAIDs are sold each year in U.S.;
- 5-10 percent of the U.S adult population routinely takes NSAIDs for pain control;
- 14 percent of the elderly U.S population routinely takes NSAIDs for pain control;
- NSAID-associated indigestion occurs in 50 percent of all

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users;

- Almost all patients who take NSAIDs long term will demonstrate sub-epithelial gastric hemorrhage;
- 8-20 percent of long term users will develop frank gut ulceration;
- About 3 percent will develop serious side-effects, leading to 100,000 hospitalizations and an estimated 16,500 deaths;
- The annual cost to treat NSAID complications exceeds \$1.5 billion annually.

Natural biochemical treatments may be a way to curtail the damage caused by NSAIDs. A recent article published in Surgical Neurology examined the use of fish oil supplements in the treatment of patients with discogenic pain. One of the authors is a neurosurgeon who evaluated some 250 patients, none of which turned out to be a surgical case; all were suffering from degenerative disc disease with facet

arthropathy in the cervical and/or lumbar spine.

All patients were taking NSAIDs and 75 percent were on COX2 inhibitors. They were asked to take EPA/DHA from fish oil, at a dose of 2.4 grams for two weeks, and 1.2 grams thereafter. Questionnaires were sent to all patients and 125 were returned at an average of 75 days on fish oil supplements. Seventy-eight percent of patients were taking 1.2 grams, while 22 percent decided to continue with 2.4 grams/day.

A total of 59 percent of patients were able to discontinue the use of any NSAIDs; 60 percent reported their overall pain was less; 60 percent stated their joint pain was improved; 80 percent stated they were satisfied with their improvement; and 88 percent stated they would continue taking fish oil. Only two patients reported mild side effects of loose bowel movements on 1.2 grams/day. These positive results should not be surprising, as pharmacology tests tell us that EPA/DHA supplements approximate the potency of NSAIDs.

The authors of the article mention additional natural anti-inflammatory agents, including turmeric, boswellia, bromelain,

white willow bark, and green tea. Ginger is also a popular herb that is known to have anti-inflammatory properties.

So keep your nutritional approach simple and straightforward. For pain and inflammation, eat an anti-inflammatory diet and take a multivitamin, plus magnesium, EPA/DHA, coenzyme Q10, ginger/turmeric and, if suffering from joint pain, glucosamine as well. This approach will work for almost everyone except those taking anti-coagulants such as Coumadin. The authors also indicate that patients taking aspirin are not at risk if they take fish oil.

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