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**Anti-Inflammatory Medicines**

**What are anti-inflammatory medicines?**

Anti-inflammatory medicines can relieve pain and inflammation. Inflammation is the redness, heat, and swelling caused by infection, disease, or injury. There are 2 main kinds of anti-inflammatory medicines: nonsteroidal and steroidal.

* Aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen are **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**. You don't need a prescription to buy low doses of these medicines. Higher doses need a prescription. Some NSAID medicines called COX-2 inhibitors can be bought only with a prescription. Celebrex, for example, is a COX-2 inhibitor.
* **Steroid medicines** are similar to hormones. Some hydrocortisone skin creams are nonprescription, but most steroid medicines can be bought only with a prescription. Prescription steroids have a stronger effect than NSAIDs. They come in different forms, such as pills, shots, inhalers, creams, ointments, and eyedrops. Examples of steroidal medicines are cortisone and prednisone.

**When are they used?**

Anti-inflammatory medicines are taken for many kinds of problems, such as:

* injuries
* arthritis
* flu
* headaches
* menstrual cramps
* asthma
* skin problems.

**What should I watch out for while taking these medicines?**

**NSAID cautions**

Some possible side effects of NSAIDS are:

* upset stomach
* stomach bleeding or ulcers
* high blood pressure
* dizziness or ringing in the ears
* rash
* kidney problems.

NSAIDs increase your risk of bleeding. You should not take NSAIDs if:

* You have ulcers or a bleeding problem.
* You are taking a blood thinner.

Also, you may need to stop taking these medicines before surgery or dental work. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider or dentist that you are taking NSAIDs or aspirin.

Because of the problems NSAIDS can cause, they should not be taken for any reason for more than 10 days unless recommended by your healthcare provider. The risks of NSAIDs increase with age. Read the label and take as directed.

If you have asthma, ask your provider about taking NSAIDS. Some people who have asthma can have an asthma attack after taking aspirin.

Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. (Salicylates are chemicals that are related to aspirin.) This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, Alka Seltzer, and Pepto Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin or other salicylates when they are ill with a virus are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

Some COX-2 inhibitor NSAIDs have been linked to a greater risk of heart attack and stroke. If you are taking this type of NSAID, talk to your healthcare provider about it.

**Steroid cautions**

Using a steroid for a long time can have serious side effects, such as:

* weakening of bone, leading to osteoporosis and an increased risk of broken bones
* eye problems such as cataracts or glaucoma
* problems fighting infection
* mood changes
* high blood pressure
* high blood sugar and diabetes.

Take your medicine exactly as your healthcare provider prescribes. Don't take more or less of it than prescribed. Don't take it longer than prescribed. But don't stop taking a steroid without your provider's approval. Suddenly stopping a steroid medicine can also cause problems. Usually you lower your dosage slowly before stopping it.

Remember that your provider needs to know if you are taking any anti-inflammatory drugs. They can cause serious side effects and may change how other medicines work. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all medicines you are taking and your risks. Follow your provider's instructions for taking the medicine and reporting side effects. Also, if you get all of your medicines from the same pharmacist, you can help prevent dangerous drug interactions.

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