

Easing Joint Pain: Are NSAIDs Right for You?

What are NSAIDs?

When you have pain from arthritis or muscle soreness, fever, or swelling, you might take pain drugs called NSAIDs. NSAID stands for non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug. You can buy some NSAIDs without a prescription. These include aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil and generic), and naproxen (Aleve and generic). All work equally well. For other NSAIDs, such as Celebrex or Mobic, you need a prescription from your doctor.

NSAIDs are not for everyone.

Talk to your doctor before you use NSAIDs if:

- You have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, kidney disease, or if you smoke.
- You take aspirin to protect your heart. Ask your doctor if you should take acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic) or naproxen (Aleve and generic) instead of other NSAIDs.
- You have stomach ulcers or bleeding. Talk to your doctor about taking acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic) or a low dose of an NSAID with an over-the-counter drug that reduces stomach acid.

Tell your doctor all of the medicines, vitamins, and herbs you take. Some may change the way NSAIDs work.



If you have arthritis in your joints (osteoarthritis) or another kind of chronic pain, ask your doctor if it's safe for you to use NSAIDs on a regular basis.

NSAIDs can have side effects.

Taking NSAIDs too often or in high doses can cause side effects. Side effects include:

- Bleeding in the intestines
- Heart attacks
- Kidney failure
- Stomach ulcers
- Strokes

NSAIDs are often overused.

Do you use NSAIDs three or more times a week for any of the reasons listed below? If you do, you may be overusing them.

- Arthritis
- Chronic pain
- Everyday aches and pains
- Mild headaches
- Muscle soreness and injuries after exercise
- Stiffness

Talk to your doctor about your pain and about how best to manage it.

Our advice:

Use caution when taking NSAIDs. Take the lowest dose that works for you. And do not take NSAIDs for more than 10 days without talking with your doctor.

We compared the cost and safety of NSAIDs and how well they work to reduce pain. We chose these two as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*:

 **Ibuprofen** (generic prescription and over-the-counter)

 **Naproxen** (generic prescription and over-the-counter)

The chart on the next page can help you compare costs.

Drugs to Treat Pain

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue. We recommend these drugs because they work as well and are as safe as the other drugs, and they cost less. The dollar symbol **\$** means the dose of that drug may be available for a low monthly cost through programs offered by large chain stores, like Costco, CVS, Kmart, Kroger, Sam's Club, Target, Walmart, and Walgreens. Some of these stores have restrictions or charge a membership fee, however.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Best Buy	Generic Name & Strength	Brand Name	Over-the-counter (OTC) or need a prescription (Rx)	Pills per Day ¹	Cost per Month ²
	Celecoxib 200 mg capsule	Celebrex	Rx	One	\$181
	Diclofenac 25 mg capsule	Zipsor	Rx	Four	\$412
	Diclofenac 50 mg tablet	Generic	Rx	Three	\$46 \$
	Diclofenac 1% topical gel	Voltaren gel	Rx	32 grams/day	\$196
	Diclofenac 1.3% topical patch	Flector patch	Rx	Two patches	\$478/area
	Etodolac 400 mg extended-release tablet	Generic	Rx	One	\$41
	Ibuprofen 200 mg tablet	Advil ³	OTC ⁴	Six	\$18
CR BEST BUY	Ibuprofen 200 mg tablet	Generic³	OTC⁴	Six	\$11
CR BEST BUY	Ibuprofen 400 mg tablet	Generic	Rx	Four	\$15 \$
	Indomethacin 50 mg capsule	Generic	Rx	Two	\$35 \$
	Naproxen 220 mg tablet	Aleve ³	OTC ⁴	Three	\$13
CR BEST BUY	Naproxen 220 mg tablet	Generic³	OTC⁴	Three	\$10
CR BEST BUY	Naproxen 250 mg tablet	Generic	Rx	Two	\$45 \$

- As commonly recommended or prescribed. Many NSAIDs must be taken multiple times per day. Convenience of dosing might be a factor for some patients. If switching from one NSAID to another, talk with your doctor about what the correct dosing would be for different NSAIDs. They come in a wide variety of recommended doses.
- Monthly cost reflects national average retail prices for March 2013, rounded to the nearest dollar. Data provided by Symphony Health Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.
- This is a nonprescription medicine. Generic versions or store brand might be less expensive. Prices for these medications were obtained by Consumer Reports secret shoppers from five major chain pharmacies (CVS, Rite Aid, Target, Walgreens, and Walmart) and local supermarkets across the U.S. in January 2013. The prices from the various stores were averaged in order to get per pill prices, which were then converted into a monthly price based on the maximum recommended number of pills per day.
- OTC stands for over-the-counter, meaning it is a nonprescription drug.