

# 5 MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE WHEN TREATING PAIN



**ADVANCED PAINCARE**

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## 5 MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE WHEN TREATING PAIN

We all experience pain from time to time. It's not possible, practical or necessary to see a professional every time. So, we treat ourselves, because we do want relief. Most of the time, the pain subsides, either on its own or because of our self-therapy. We often treat pain ourselves with some pre-conceived notions in mind about the best approach. Surprisingly, some of these common notions are wrong. In fact, not just wrong, but dangerous.

Let's take a look at 5 of the most commonly held notions about treating pain that are **WRONG**. I'll correct these notions so we can treat pain more effectively and safer.



# 1. Assuming that over-the-counter medications are safe

Everyone is familiar with Tylenol® (acetaminophen), Aleve® (naproxen) and Advil® (ibuprofen.) You probably have one or more of these in your medicine cabinet. You can buy them in every grocery store, every pharmacy and most gas stations. How dangerous can they be? Quite dangerous, in fact.

In the United States, acetaminophen toxicity occurs relatively frequently. The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that it is one of the most common medications involved in poisoning and toxicity. Acetaminophen toxicity has replaced viral hepatitis as the most common cause of acute liver failure and is the second most common cause of liver failure requiring transplantation. This can happen by taking too much acetaminophen in a day (or by parents and caregivers inadvertently giving too much to a child), using 2 or more medications at the same time that each contain acetaminophen or by drinking alcohol while taking acetaminophen.

In 2012, the safe limit for acetaminophen in adults was reduced from 4 to 3 grams per day or 650 mg every 6 hours. That's one Tylenol Arthritis® pill every 6 hours or no more than 4 per day. How many people think of 4 Tylenol a day as maximal dose? Not many, I bet.

Products containing acetaminophen (prescription and non-prescription) are incredibly numerous, including many cold

and sinus formulas and many analgesics. Think Vicodin®, Percocet®, Excedrin®. Even Vick's®, Zicam® and Cepacol® contain acetaminophen. Taking acetaminophen tablets along with one of the many products that also contain it is a sure way to increase your risk of accidental toxicity and liver damage.

Why does acetaminophen damage the liver? For the same reason that heavy drinkers suffer acetaminophen toxicity more easily than non-drinkers. Acetaminophen is metabolized in the liver and a small portion is metabolized into a compound that is very harmful to the liver. Heavy drinkers produce more of this harmful compound, putting them at a higher risk for toxicity with acetaminophen.

How about Aleve® and Advil®? These non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDS) are effective on dental pain, bone pain, menstrual cramps and many other painful conditions. Yes they are, but they also increase the risk of ulcer disease and bleeding from the stomach 4 to 5 times. They increase the risk of heart attacks in anyone predisposed to cardiovascular disease, such as those with a known narrowing of the cardiac arteries or those with a history of stroke. They increase blood pressure in those with hypertension. There is also a concern that the cardio-protective effect of a daily aspirin is reduced in those using NSAIDS. NSAIDS reduce kidney function in those with renal disease and interact with commonly used anti-coagulants, such as coumadin and heparin, increasing the risk of bleeding. WOW, And these are over-the counter medications?

The NSAIDS can be used safely if they are avoided by those with cardiovascular disease and hypertension. Anyone taking anticoagulants should also avoid them altogether. Those with renal disease are counselled to not use them. To reduce the risk of stomach ulceration and bleeding they may be taken along with an anti-ulcer medication , such as omeprazole or Prilosec®.



## **2. Not considering how your lifestyle contributes to your pain**

**OK, most of us could stand to lose a few pounds.** But are those extra pounds really contributing to your joint pain? Probably. You see, joints are especially vulnerable to the consequences of carrying extra weight because joint forces at the hips and knees increase 3 times that weight with normal walking so every extra pound you carry is like the hips and knees carrying around 3 extra pounds. 20 pounds overweight? That's 60 extra pounds of force on those joints. Try this: stuff a backpack until it weighs 20 pounds and then carry it around for a day. You'll see what I mean. Those who are overweight develop arthritis at an earlier age. While you cannot reverse damage in a joint by losing

weight you can reduce pain in those joints. Even moderate weight loss, as little as 11 pounds, has been shown to reduce the formation of knee arthritis by 50%.

Let's talk about smoking because there are still a few out there who have not gotten the memo that it's really a bad idea. Smoking reduces the ability of your heart and lungs to deliver oxygen to your body. Oxygen is required for our body to work properly and to heal. If oxygen-poor blood is being delivered to your muscles and joints they work less well and are more prone to injury. Healing is delayed and impaired. It makes sense that smokers suffer more chronic pain than non-smokers.

Not sleeping well? There's a proven link between insomnia and musculoskeletal pain. But it goes both ways. That is, those in pain sleep less. The topic is very complex and probably under-investigated. Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and poor sleep habits all contribute to insomnia in some. Likewise, pure mechanical physical conditions such as sleep apnea contribute in others. Talk to your doctor about this one and please try non-pharmacologic solutions first as sleeping pills are rarely a good long-term solution.

For about 1% of the population, avoidance of gluten is necessary to live. Gluten is harmful to them in that it triggers an inflammatory reaction in the gut, limiting the absorption of vital nutrients. These few have celiac disease. For the remainder, gluten is simply a protein that is a bit more difficult to digest than the protein found in meats and

rice. But today, gluten is so prevalent that most of us over-eat gluten and would be well advised to cut back. There is plenty of evidence that reduction of gluten intake in some gluten sensitive people can lessen joint and abdominal pain by reducing the inflammatory reaction that gluten triggers.

### 3. Ignoring pain

**Everybody experiences pain.** Various pains are like the noises your car makes. Most of the time pain is nothing to worry about but sometimes pain signals a serious condition alerting you to stop and pay attention. One pain that should not be ignored is any new sudden headache. A new headache, a sudden headache, a very severe headache or a change in your typical headache can signal a stroke or a tumor. This pain should never be ignored, particularly if there are other neurological symptoms as well, such as change in your vision, change in your speech or weakness anywhere.

Pain in the calf, especially after spending extended time sitting or in bed, may signal a blood clot.

Persistent joint pain may be simple degenerative arthritis but Lupus, hepatitis and Rheumatoid Arthritis also cause chronic joint pain. These conditions all require specialized medical care to avoid complications.

Severe abdominal pain can be a medical emergency when it's associated with appendicitis or a blockage in the gut. It may signal pancreatitis, gall bladder disease or hepatitis.

You get the point: severe or persistent abdominal pain could be the presenting symptoms of a wide array of medical conditions. Don't ignore it!



#### 4. To ice or to heat? That is the question.

**Both simple. Both safe.** It's not hard. Ice is for Injuries. Injuries cause tissues to be swollen and hot and painful due to an inflammatory reaction. This inflammatory reaction is not all bad; it's actually the first step in the healing cascade. Ice is a safe, low cost way to reduce the pain and swelling associated with inflammation.

Heat is for muscles; it relaxes tight muscles and improves blood flow. How about injured muscles? I recommend ice for acute injuries of all types due to the inflammation associated with injuries. If you apply heat to acute injuries



you'll suffer worse pain and swelling. If you apply ice to tight muscles, they'll get tighter.

## 5. Going to bed with a backache

**Eventually, 80% or more of us will experience a back ache.** The pain may stay centered in the back or, if a nerve is irritated, spread down one or both legs. Despite how commonly back pain occurs, in many instances, maybe most instances, the source of the pain cannot be determined. The back is a complex structure, consisting of muscles, bones, ligaments, nerves, joints and discs, all surrounding the spinal column. These elements work in concert to coordinate the movements and sensations that we take for granted. When back pain strikes suddenly, we can be brought to our knees. It's tempting to crawl into bed and stay there because any movement can provoke pain. As tempting as this is, it's entirely wrong-headed if indulged for more than a day or two.

You see, the back, like the rest of our body, is made to move. If we stay immobilized in bed, only venturing out of bed long enough to be helped to the bathroom, our back muscles tighten and hurt even more. Then movement becomes even more difficult. By keeping the back limber with regular movement and gentle exercise we can avoid the progression of increasing back muscle tension, increasing pain and declining activity. Depression, blood clots and reduced strength can also occur. Once this

downward spiral starts it gets harder to reverse so don't let it start. Keep moving when you have back pain.

In fact, movement and exercise are important for back pain relief. They keep the muscles limber, maintain and build strength in the muscles supporting the back and actually reduce pressure on the discs of the back, in comparison to standing and sitting, which impart greater forces on the lower spine. Walking, yoga, swimming, stretching are all good exercises for a bad back.

For help with your pain, call Advanced PainCare for consultation.



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