

6. **Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs** NSAIDs (Pronounced EN-seds), are a group of drugs which decrease the inflammation (pain and swelling) in arthritic joints. The pain relief from NSAIDs can be quite amazing. Although they are commonly referred to as “arthritis pills”, **none of them will in any way influence the outcome of the arthritis.** There are many NSAIDs available, and newer ones are constantly being brought onto the market. The “newest” one is not necessarily the most effective. Most people respond better to one NSAID than to another, and you may have to try several before the “right” one can be found for you. They all have potentially serious side effects and should only be taken under medical supervision. Most can only be obtained by prescription and are expensive. **Aspirin (which is also an NSAID!) is cheap**, and is often just as effective as any of the other NSAIDs. It should therefore be tried first. If even coated aspirin (Ecotrin) affects your stomach, then try extra-strength Tylenol. Most NSAIDs are “COX I Inhibitors.”

**Always take NSAIDs with food or antacids, or with a full glass of water. These medications have potentially serious side effects, and should only be taken under close medical supervision.**

#### **Side Effects of NSAIDs**

Please read this section carefully if Dr. Huddleston has prescribed NSAIDs for you.

About 30% of patients on NSAIDs can expect some side effects. Most side effects are mild and may go away without treatment. Others are more serious and should be treated right away.

**Most NSAIDs can affect the liver, bone marrow or kidneys (see Table below). Although Dr. Huddleston may give you the initial prescription for NSAIDs, and help you find the most effective one for you, we prefer your family doctor or internist to continue prescribing the medication, since blood tests are needed at least every three months to determine if you are having harmful side effects. The damage is reversible if the medication is stopped in time.**

**Stomach Problems:** Stop the medication immediately if you get stomach pain, cramping or burning. Check with your doctor if you get nausea, constipation or diarrhea which lasts for more than three days.

**Fluid Retention:** This may happen if the NSAIDs affect your kidney function. You may notice swelling of the ankles, feet, or lower legs, or an unusual weight gain. If this continues for more than two weeks, check with your doctor. Vioxx is prone to causing fluid retention.

**Bruising Tendency:** NSAIDs interfere with the clotting of blood and may cause you to bruise easily. If you have any bleeding problems or take blood thinners, check with your doctor before taking NSAIDs.

**Dizziness, Lightheadedness, or Drowsiness:** These are rare. If they do occur they usually go away when your body adjusts to the medicine.

**Stomach Ulcers:** Some people taking NSAIDs develop stomach ulcers, and occasionally these may bleed. The bleeding can come with very little warning, and can even be severe enough to cause death. This is why stomach symptoms should be taken very seriously in patients on NSAIDs.

**If you have severe heartburn, or if your stools turn pitch black (altered blood), or if you vomit blood or material that looks like coffee grounds, stop the medicine and call your doctor immediately.**

Note that iron pills (taken for anemia or during the period you are giving blood for auto transfusion) will also turn your stools pitch black.

Most people can take NSAIDs without having stomach problems. However, **you may have a higher risk** if you have had previous ulcers, or are over the age of 60, use cortisone (such as Prednisone), smoke or drink alcohol. If you are in any of these high risk categories, it is recommended that you take Cytotec (which helps to protect the stomach) in addition to the NSAID. Cytotec is not routinely prescribed as it is expensive and has side effects of its own. There are other medications which can help protect the stomach.

#### **Drugs that may interact with NSAIDs**

Some drugs may interact adversely with NSAIDs. In some cases the combination should be avoided completely; in others, the dosage of either drug may need compensatory adjustment.

**Never take Aspirin-containing medication at the same time as taking NSAIDs.**

**If you are taking any of the following drugs, consult your internist before commencing treatment with NSAIDs.** There may be others not included in this list: aspirin, lithium, phenytoin, methotrexate, digoxin, probenecid, barbiturates, anticoagulants, high blood pressure medications, antacids, oral diabetes medications or diuretics.

**Allergy to the NSAIDs:** This may be manifested as rapid breathing, gasping, wheezing, fainting, hives, itching, skin rash, rapid heart beat, or sudden puffiness of the eyelids. Allergy is exceedingly rare. It occurs sometimes in people who are truly allergic to aspirin. If you have these symptoms and you do not have someone to drive you to the hospital, call an ambulance and get to the hospital as soon as you can, since the allergic reaction could be severe and need urgent medical treatment.

**Remember to discontinue the use of any aspirin or aspirin-containing drugs 7 days prior to your surgery. All nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications should be**

**discontinued 7 days prior to your surgery.**

The reason for discontinuing these medications is that they can increase bleeding at the time of surgery. Tylenol, Darvocet, and Tylenol with Codeine can be taken by mouth up to the night before the operation. If you have an uncemented implant, you should not use Indomethacin after surgery unless approved by Dr. Huddleston, since it may interfere with bone-ingrowth into the implant surface.

**RULES FOR PATIENTS TAKING NSAIDS**

- A. Tell your doctor if you are taking any other prescription or over-the-counter medications. Also if you have any other medical problems, especially stomach ulcers, bleeding tendency, colitis, diverticulitis (or other stomach or bowel disease), kidney disease, asthma or liver disease.
- B. Always take NSAIDs with a meal and plenty of liquids.
- C. **Don't** exceed the dose prescribed by your doctor if it doesn't seem to be working to your satisfaction. There is a maximum effective dose for each NSAID and it could be very harmful to exceed that dose.
- D. **Don't** take NSAIDs only when you have pain or only when you expect to have pain (such as before a game of golf). NSAIDs may take up to two weeks to reach their full effect.
- E. **Don't** take NSAIDs with alcohol or caffeine-containing beverages. These beverages make stomach problems worse.
- F. **Don't** simultaneously take other medications containing aspirin compounds or ibuprofen. Taking the prescribed NSAID in addition may cause side-effects from too much NSAID in your BODY onunload="leave()". You can take Tylenol together with any of the NSAIDs.
- G. **Don't** drive or operate machinery if your NSAID makes you feel drowsy or dizzy.