

What Are NSAIDs?

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs (pronounced en-saids), are the most prescribed medications for treating conditions such as arthritis. Most people are familiar with over-the-counter, nonprescription NSAIDs, such as aspirin and ibuprofen.

NSAIDs are more than just pain relievers. They also help reduce inflammation and lower fevers. They prevent blood from clotting, which is good in some cases but not so beneficial in others.

For example, because they reduce clotting action, some NSAIDs, especially aspirin, may have a protective effect against heart disease. However, you may bruise more easily. NSAIDs can increase the risk of developing nausea, an upset stomach, or an ulcer. They also may interfere with kidney function.

Risks

Tell your physician if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, asthma, or a history of kidney or liver disease, or have had ulcers in the past. People older than 65 years of age must be especially careful when taking NSAIDs. Also tell your doctor about other medications you are taking. NSAIDs may intensify or counteract the effects of some medications. Both the risk and the severity of side effects increases the longer you take NSAIDs.

How They Work

NSAIDs work by preventing an enzyme (a protein that triggers changes in the body) from doing its job. The enzyme is called cyclooxygenase, or COX, and it has two forms. COX-1 protects the stomach lining from harsh acids and digestive chemicals. It also helps maintain kidney function. COX-2 is produced when joints are injured or inflamed.

Traditional NSAIDs block the actions of both COX-1 and COX-2, which is why they can cause stomach upset and bleeding as well as ease pain and inflammation.

Here are some common traditional NSAIDs:

Generic Name	Brand Names
Aspirin	Made by several companies
Ibuprofen	Motrin®, Advil®, Motrin IB®
Naproxen	Naprosyn®, Aleve®
Nabumetone	Relafen®

Source: American Academy of Family Physicians, 2008

NSAIDs come in different strengths and formulas. Some may work better for you than others. Your physician can help you find the dose and medication that works best for you.

Generally, you should take NSAIDs with food or a glass of milk and should avoid drinking alcohol while you are taking NSAIDs.