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NSAIDs

"I just don't like taking pills." I hear that a lot, and I understand it in most cases. The exception is pain. If lifestyle will solve the problem, I'm all for it whether it's exercise, diet, stress management, or supplements. But living in pain isn't my idea of fun. I'm not talking about the pain that's the result of a severe injury; that may require a comprehensive approach that could include surgery and prescription medications. But for everything else such as a headache, sprained ankle, severe muscle spasms, and everything in between, you'll probably want NSAIDs—non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Those are over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen and naproxen.

There are two reasons that I think are important for appropriate use of NSAIDs. First, pain can alter your body alignment. You start favoring the painful area whether it's in your jaw, your shoulder, your hip, or one of your legs. That changes your mechanics and puts stress on other areas of your body. Before you know it, more things hurt because your alignment is off. You can even establish a pain pathway that will persist even after the problem is solved, resulting in phantom pain.

Second, NSAIDs reduce inflammation as the name implies. That means it allows blood flow to resume, bringing nutrients and taking away waste products to promote real healing. The anti-inflammatory effect can take longer than the pain-relieving effect, so you may have to take NSAIDs consistently for a few days. But the net effect is that a person can recover faster when pain and inflammation are reduced.

NSAIDs are not without issues, and in Wednesday's message I'll address some of them. Until then, if you're in pain, talk with your physician or healthcare provider about whether they may be appropriate for you.

What is pain preventing you from doing? And what are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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