



March 30, 2011 – Grand Rapids, MI

Protecting Your Stomach from NSAIDs

It seems the older you get, the wider the variety of things that can go wrong. For almost two months, Paula has had a slipped disk in her left jaw. The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is a type of ball-and-socket joint with a cartilage disk as cushioning. If the disk slips out of place, moving the joint makes the bones wear against each other, causing pain and a scratching sound inside the head. Talking, chewing, putting on mascara—many activities of daily life involve TMJ movement.

To reduce inflammation and give the disk a chance to work its way back into position, Paula's been taking 800 mg of ibuprofen three times a day, and it's tough on the stomach. When she asked me to see if I could find any research on protecting the stomach during high-dose NSAIDs therapy, I started searching. Unfortunately I didn't find much—there's an opportunity for some grad student who needs a research topic. Here's what you can do.

1. Eat something.

Paula quickly learned that without food, the ibuprofen doesn't stay down. What and how much you should eat depend on your particular digestive system, but it may be that a little fat can go a long way. Because it takes the longest to digest, fat may provide a little more protection than carbohydrates and protein. Paula says she's eaten more almond-butter-and-jelly sandwiches in the last few weeks than ever before in her life.

2. Take lecithin.

Adding 500 to 1,500 mg of lecithin emulsifies the fat you're taking and can also reduce the discomfort from the NSAIDs. Paula takes two lecithin capsules or tablets with every NSAID dose.

As I said Monday, pain should never be ignored—find out what's causing it and what you can do to reduce or eliminate it. Dealing with pain isn't always easy, but it's important, and if NSAIDs are part of the solution, protect your digestive system as much as you can.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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