



## Are Over-the-Counter Anti-inflammatory Pain Relievers Safe for Older Adults?

Over the counter pain relievers such as Ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin and other anti-inflammatory drugs can be unsafe for many older adults, especially when taken daily. Geriatricians suggest older adults take acetaminophen such as Tylenol, because it causes almost no side effects and only rarely interacts with other medications a person may be taking.

Although ibuprofen is popular with arthritis sufferers because it's effective at relieving pain, older adults should talk to a healthcare provider before taking any NSAIDs, meaning non-steroids. This includes newer over the counter painkillers such as Aleve and stronger prescription-strength such as Celebrex and Indocin.

These pain relievers, known as NSAIDs, are well known for having the following side effects in older adults:

- Decreased kidney function as a result of decreased blood flow to the kidneys. This can affect the way the body processes other medicines and can increase blood pressure.
- Irritation of the lining of the stomach and bowels, which can cause internal bleeding.

Every year literally tens of thousands of people, mostly elderly, are hospitalized because of NSAIDs.

Older adults who strongly prefer ibuprofen to acetaminophen should talk to the doctor and ask for a kidney function test. Mild to moderate decreases in kidney function usually do not cause symptoms but can be detected with a blood test.

Also, most older adults should avoid the "PM" version of Ibuprofen, Advil and acetaminophen such as Tylenol, or any other over-the-counter medicine because these medicines contain sedating antihistamines that do make you sleepy, but in older folks they can also cause constipation, dry mouth, difficulty urinating, and confusion. Older adults who take anticholinergics also are known to fall more often.

These medicines can be especially dangerous for people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, since they counter the effect of medicines such as Aricept.

*Info provided by: Leslie Kernisan, M.D., University of California, San Francisco, and the San Francisco V.A. Medical Center and appeared in the August 2010 newsletter of Polk Family Caregivers.*