

7 Natural Painkillers That Really Work

Everyday pain is common from headaches to backaches. But, with warnings mounting on all types of painkillers from prescription opioids to over-the-counter medicines, you may be searching for a healthier way to ease your pain.

Turn to these natural painkillers:

- **White willow bark.** Used as a painkiller by the ancient Greeks, white willow bark is a natural anti-inflammatory that contains salicin, a chemical similar to acetylsalicylic acid found in aspirin.

Aspirin lowers levels of prostaglandins, hormone-like substances that help the body deal with infection. When high levels of prostaglandins are produced in response to injuries or infections, however, they cause inflammation, which produce swelling, pain, and fever.

According to the University of Maryland, there's good evidence that willow bark both relieves pain and reduces inflammation. It's especially useful to treat headaches, osteoarthritis, and low back pain, and white willow bark isn't as likely to upset your stomach or cause bleeding as aspirin.

- **Turmeric.** An Italian study found that patients with osteoarthritis who took a special formulation of turmeric for 90 days experienced a 58 percent decrease in pain.

Psychological tests taken by the same patients found a 300 percent improvement in their well-being, and blood tests showed a 16-fold decrease in the amount of C-reactive protein, a marker for inflammation and also a risk factor for heart disease.

Patients taking the turmeric formulation were able to reduce their pain medication by 63 percent compared to the control group.

- **Capsaicin.** Capsaicin is a derivative of hot peppers, the component which gives peppers their heat. It soothes pain by desensitizing pain-causing nerve receptors called C-fibers when applied to the skin.

Studies have shown capsaicin to be helpful in relieving back pain as well as pain caused by arthritis, shingles, headaches, fibromyalgia, psoriasis, and diabetic neuropathy.

In a study at Case Western Reserve University of Ohio, 80 percent of patients with arthritis reported a decrease in pain after using topical capsaicin for two weeks.

A University of Toronto study found that topical capsaicin cream significantly reduced pain in patients with post-herpetic neuralgia nerve pain (persistent pain in some people who have had shingles). Two years later, 86 percent of patients reported it was still effective.

A University of Oxford study found that 40 percent of patients who used a capsaicin cream cut their pain by 50 percent.

- **SAM-e.** S-adenosyl-L-methionine or SAM-e, is a chemical that's found naturally in the body. Eleven randomized, controlled studies, including one by the University of California, Irvine, found that SAM-e was as effective at reducing the joint pain of arthritis as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

The California study found that after taking SAM-e for two months, patients reported their pain from osteoarthritis had been slashed by 50 percent.

Experts speculate SAM-e works by increasing amounts of the feel-good chemicals serotonin and dopamine.

- **Rose Hips.** Numerous clinical studies have shown that rose hips significantly reduce the pain associated with arthritis of the hips, hands, and knees.

A randomized, double-blind Dutch trial found that rose hips reduced pain significantly in 82 percent of patients with osteoarthritis.

A clinical study conducted at the U.K.'s Sheffield Hallam University found that rose hip powder reduced inflammation and pain in people with arthritis, and improved movement in almost 90 percent of participants.

One study published in the journal, *Osteoarthritis and Cartilage*, found that rose hip powder was almost three times more effective at relieving pain than acetaminophen (Tylenol).

- **Arnica.** Arnica, sometimes called the 'mountain daisy' has been used since the 12th century to ease pain.

Athletes use arnica to relieve muscle soreness and strains, and it significantly reduces bruising.

It's also used to reduce the swelling and pain of arthritic joints. A randomized, double-blind 2007 study found that arnica gel alleviated the pain of osteoarthritis of the hand as effectively as ibuprofen.

A 2008 study published in *Complementary Medicine* found that arnica relieved signs of inflammation as well as the painkiller diclofenac.

- **Bromelain.** A natural enzyme found in pineapples, bromelain eases the pain of osteoarthritis.

A double-blind German study found that an enzyme preparation containing bromelain reduced pain in 80 percent of patients. In fact, it was as effective as the anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac in reducing pain and stiffness with fewer side

effects.

Some experts believe bromelain may break down prostaglandins, the proteins in the blood that cause inflammation and lead to pain.

All of the nutrients discussed above are available in supermarkets and health food stores. Follow the directions on the bottle.

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