

Help for When It Hurts

The presence of prolonged pain can change a person's outlook on life.

Question I suffer from mild joint pain that sometimes prevents me from jogging or enjoying my needlework. Can you recommend an herbal remedy?

E.K., Flint, Michigan

Answer You are not alone. About one in three adults in the United States suffers from some type of chronic pain, according to the American Chronic Pain Association. In fact, it is the No. 1 cause of adult disability in the United States. Joint pain, headaches and backaches are the most common sources.

Chronic pain can be mild, excruciating, episodic or continuous. Sometimes it's no more than a mere inconvenience, but often it is incapacitating.

Sleeplessness, inactivity, irritability, depression and even additional pain all can result. The presence of prolonged pain can change a person's outlook on life and put stress on relationships with family and friends.

What causes pain? Many things. One source is inflammation.

Normally, inflammation is a good sign. For example, when your ankle swells after you've sprained it, your body is telling you that your immune system is sending white blood cells and other hormonelike substances to start the healing process. This type of inflammation leads to acute pain that usually

stops when the swelling subsides and the ankle heals.

The inflammation that leads to chronic pain, however, goes deeper. Chronic inflammatory conditions in the body usually involve the overproduction of compounds such as prostaglandins and cytokines. One of the building blocks for these inflammatory compounds is linoleic acid, an omega-6 fatty acid found primarily in vegetable oils such as safflower, soy and sunflower oils.

Your body converts linoleic acid to a substance called arachidonic acid. The COX-2 enzyme then converts arachidonic acid to prostaglandin E2, which can cause inflammation and lead to pain.

Fortunately, you can fight back. Certain nutrients—such as ginger root extract, boswellia, turmeric and an herbal extract called OxyGene—can inhibit the COX-2 enzyme and reduce inflammation. The anti-inflammatory properties of these herbs work together to alleviate pain associated with acute and chronic conditions.

Also, bromelain, an enzyme derived from pineapple, as well as cat's claw bark extract, have both been shown in scientific studies to help relieve the pain and swelling that come from exercise or sports injuries.

These key nutrients—taken according to the product label—can help you go on with your day-to-day activities more comfortably.

Question A friend of mine told me that white willow bark works the same as aspirin. What is this product—and is my friend

right?

T.B., Little Rock, Arkansas

Answer White willow bark is, as its name implies, derived from the bark of the willow tree. It is the original source for salicylic acid, which was the active ingredient in aspirin before aspirin was made synthetically.

The bark therefore has the same effect on the body as aspirin but without any of the adverse side effects, such as stomach upset. Studies also have identified several other components of white willow bark that have antioxidant, fever-reducing, antiseptic and immune-boosting effects.

Its use dates to the time of Hippocrates (400 B.C.), when patients were advised to chew the bark to reduce fever and inflammation. It has been used for centuries in Europe and China for the treatment of fever, pain, headaches and inflammatory conditions such as arthritis.

Today, we rely on the herb to treat the same ailments. A standard dose in extract form is 60 milligrams to 240 milligrams a day.

A word of caution, however: Because white willow bark contains salicin, people who are allergic or sensitive to salicylates—such as aspirin—should not use it. If you are pregnant or breast-feeding do not use it.

Also, some researchers suggest that people with conditions such as asthma, diabetes, gout, gastritis, hemophilia and stomach ulcers should avoid this product. If you have any of these conditions or are taking any medications, consult your

healthcare provider before taking willow bark.

Reginald B. Cherry, M.D., has been practicing diagnostic and preventive medicine for more than 30 years and specializes in the use of nutrition, exercise and natural supplements to lower disease risk. He is the author of several best-selling books and teaches health and healing through his weekly TV program, The Doctor and the Word. For more about his ministry go to [www.doctorandtheword.com](#). Before taking any nutritional supplement, consult your doctor.