

Choose Wisely

(This article was inspired by two realities which we see in our communities. There has been a large increase in the use/abuse of opiates and many people over the age of 40 take a variety of over the counter and prescription analgesics. The long term solution to pain should include alternatives to drugs.)

Are you feeling old? Do you wake up every morning with a stiff and painful hip or knee? Is your low back complaining when you sit for too long? Maybe you've been told it's arthritis and that there's nothing you can do but take anti-inflammatories and painkillers to ease your suffering. If so, you have lots of company.

Chronic musculoskeletal pain is a very common complaint. An estimated 80% of adults in Canada take analgesics, many of them on a daily basis or several times a month to relieve joint pain, back pain and sore muscles. Drugs like aspirin and ibuprofen and acetaminophen, whether prescribed by a medical doctor or available over the counter, are widely used but many people are unaware of the risks and don't realize they have alternatives.

Anti-inflammatories can cause ulcers and bleeding in your upper digestive tract, even when taken at recommended doses. They may also increase the risk of stroke and heart disease and kidney damage.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is now the leading cause of liver failure. Taken over several days, as little as 25% above the maximum daily dose (just two additional extra-strength pills a day) has been reported to cause serious liver damage. And the fact is, all these drugs can do is make you feel better temporarily – until the next dose.

Pain and stiffness or liver damage and ulcers – it's a tough choice. But there are safer options available. If you developed a fever and started to take medications to bring it down but as the drugs wore off the fever returned, would you continue to take the drugs day after day to keep it down? Or would you want to investigate what's causing the fever in the first place?

You may believe that we don't know what causes arthritis, but we do. All joints are designed to function in specific ways. The underlying cause of joint inflammation is faulty loading – subjecting a joint to forces that it wasn't designed for – due to an imbalance of muscle activity. For example, a situation often seen is when someone is sitting too much, often with one leg crossed over the other. The muscles at the front of the hip joint shorten habitually and when they stand up their low back is stiff and it is tough to straighten up. When they go for a walk their hip is contracted at the front and the muscles at the back of the hip are weakened. Their hip joint is now loading in a distorted fashion and pain and stiffness set in. If they choose to medicate (and who

wants to suffer?), they may get some temporary relief but the underlying problem remains unresolved and will steadily worsen. Eventually, with long term faulty functioning, the shock absorbing cartilage surfaces will wear out. Degeneration is an ongoing process and once it becomes extensive enough, they will be put on a waiting list for joint replacement surgery.

If you or those you love are stuck in an unending cycle of pain and stiffness and drugs, make an appointment with a Doctor of Chiropractic . They specialize in musculoskeletal problems and with a thorough history and physical examination can help to determine the nature of the dysfunction. They can identify the cause of your pain and stiffness and assist you with restoring proper function of not just the painful joint but related areas as well. That sore knee may be secondary to faulty mechanics in your pelvis or hip or foot. You may benefit greatly from specific adjustments or exercises. Your chiropractor may also recommend the use of other approaches such as massage therapy or acupuncture.

There are safe and effective alternatives to drugs for your back pain or arthritis. Respect for the human body is not available by prescription or over the counter.

Submitted by Dr. W.Dawn Armstrong, D.C.

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