

# Non-steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)



Singapore  
General Hospital  
SingHealth

## About your medicine

- NSAIDs are pain medications used to relieve your pain and inflammation (e.g. swelling, redness and warmth).
- NSAIDs may be prescribed with disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), such as methotrexate, sulfasalazine or biologic agents (e.g. rituximab) for a short period of time.
- Examples of NSAIDs include naproxen, diclofenac, mefenamic acid, ibuprofen, celecoxib and etoricoxib.

## How is the medicine given?

- It is usually given orally, either regularly or when needed. Some NSAIDs are available as suppositories or injections, although these are seldom used in the treatment of rheumatologic conditions.
- If you are taking NSAIDs for spondyloarthritis (SpA), your doctor may advise you to take NSAIDs regularly to control the inflammation.
- Doses of NSAIDs may vary from person to person. Your doctor will prescribe a suitable dose for you. It is important that you DO NOT exceed the recommended dose, as this could make the side effects much more likely.
- Most NSAIDs should be swallowed whole with a glass of water, after food to prevent stomach upset, usually once or twice a day. The tablets/capsules should not be crushed or chewed unless otherwise stated.

### **How long does it take for the medicine to be effective?**

- It usually takes 30 to 60 minutes for NSAIDs to provide pain relief. A longer time to effect (approximately 1 week) is required for anti-inflammatory effect.

### **What should I do when I am taking the medicine?**

- Keep to the dose as prescribed by your doctor. If there is persistent or unbearable pain, make an earlier appointment with your doctor.
- Come back to the hospital for regular blood test as instructed by your doctor as side effects can happen at any time during the course of treatment, and some of it may not show symptoms.

### **What should I do if I forget a dose?**

- NSAIDs are generally taken as needed and not regularly, except when directed by the doctor.
- If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember.
- If it is almost time for next dose, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule.
- Do not double the dose to make up for the missed dose.

## What are the possible side effects of the medicine?

- Common side effects:
  - Dizziness
  - Nausea
  - Gastric irritation
  - High blood pressure
  - Fluid retention
- Uncommon side effects:
  - Raised liver enzymes/liver damage (if used on long term at high doses)
  - Kidney damage
  - Worsen heart failure
  - Increase risk of heart attacks and strokes in people with existing heart disease or other risk factors for stroke
  - Asthma exacerbation
  - Gastric ulcer or bleeding

**Do inform your physician and pharmacist of any existing medical conditions to avoid serious side effects of NSAIDs.**

**If you notice any serious side effects, or other side effects not listed in this leaflet, please tell your doctor or pharmacist.**

## When do I seek immediate medical attention?

- Come back to the hospital if you have:
  - Signs of an allergic reaction, such as rash, hives, itching, blistered or peeling skin, wheezing, tightness in the chest or throat, difficulty breathing or talking, unusual hoarseness of voice, or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue or throat
  - Bad skin irritation with fever or mouth ulcers
  - Jaundice (yellowing of skin or whites of eyes)
  - Breathlessness
  - Gastric pain with dark stools

## Can I take other medicines or supplements?

- Always inform your doctor and pharmacist of all the medications that you are taking as some medications are not suitable to be taken with NSAIDs.
- NSAIDs generally cause blood to be thin. If you are taking any long term blood thinners such as aspirin, clopidogrel, ticlopidine or warfarin, do inform your doctor and pharmacist. Taking NSAIDs with a blood thinner may increase the risk of bleeding, especially in the stomach.
- Always check with your doctor or pharmacist first before self-treatment with any over-the-counter medicines.
- Do not take any supplements, alternative or herbal medicines without informing your doctor or pharmacist, as some of these may have blood thinning effect and can increase the risk of bleeding.

### **What special dietary instructions should I follow?**

- Maintain adequate hydration (2 to 3 litres of fluid a day, unless otherwise advised by your doctor).
- Eat more nutritious food (frequent but small meals are preferred).
- Alcohol should be avoided if possible or kept to a minimum as suggested by your doctor because alcohol may increase the risk of liver toxicity associated with NSAIDs.

### **Can I start a family or breastfeed?**

- Long-term use of NSAIDs may potentially affect female fertility.
- It may also potentially cause harm to the fetus and must be avoided during the last 3 months of pregnancy.
- If you are pregnant or planning to have a child, discuss it with your doctor before you begin the treatment.
- NSAIDs are probably safe to use when breastfeeding, but to be safe, check with your doctor or pharmacist first if you are breastfeeding.

### **How should I store the medicine?**

- Keep the tablets at room temperature, away from heat, moist and direct sunlight.
- Keep all medication out of reach of children.

# In Summary

## What you need to know about NSAIDs?

- Beware of the side effects and know when to seek immediate medical attention.
- In people who already have kidney disease, using NSAIDs, even for a short time, can harm the kidneys.
- Do not take over-the-counter medicines, supplements or herbal medicines without checking with your doctor/pharmacist/ advanced practiced nurse first.
- For patients who intend to start a family, consult your doctor before you start the treatment.
- If you have any questions about the treatment, please discuss it with your doctor/advanced practice nurse at 65762418 or Pharmacist at 63265077.

Produced by  
Department of Pharmacy  
Department of Rheumatology & Immunology



Singapore  
General Hospital  
SingHealth

Outram Road  
Singapore 169608  
[www.sgh.com.sg](http://www.sgh.com.sg)

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