



## Our Recommendations

The **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs** (NSAIDs) are the most frequently used medicines to treat osteoarthritis and mild to moderate pain due to conditions such as back aches, headaches, muscle spasms, premenstrual cramps, and minor sports injuries. They can cost from about \$4 to more than \$300 a month. The information in this report to talk with your doctor about the medicine and dose that is right for you, and the possible risks.

To help you and your doctor choose the right NSAID if you need one, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of a 22-page report you can access at [ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs](http://ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs). You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this *free* Web site.

### DO YOU NEED AN NSAID?

NSAIDs are effective pain relievers, but they can cause serious side effects, including stomach ulcers, gastrointestinal bleeding, kidney failure, heart attacks, and strokes. Given those risks, we recommend the following:

- Try acetaminophen (Tylenol and generics) first for mild to moderate pain.
- Avoid using NSAIDs if you've had a stomach ulcer or bleeding, or are at high risk of either.
- If you have heart disease or are at risk of a heart attack or stroke, talk with your doctor about the potential risks of taking any NSAID regularly for long periods.
- If you have kidney disease or high blood pressure, talk with your doctor about the risks of taking NSAIDs for long periods of time.
- Take the lowest dose of an NSAID that brings relief and do not take any longer than necessary.

NSAIDs block the production of substances in the body called prostaglandins, which play a role in pain, inflammation, fever, and muscle cramps and aches. At low doses, they work essentially as pain relievers. At higher doses, though, they can reduce the body's inflammatory response to tissue damage as well as relieve pain.

All NSAIDs are effective pain relievers. No NSAID has clearly been shown to be more effective than the others. NSAIDs differ substantially in price, so cost might be an important factor in which one you choose.

Taking effectiveness, safety, and cost into account, we have chosen two NSAIDs as *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs*:

- Ibuprofen – (generic only) prescription and over-the-counter
- Naproxen – (Aleve and generic) prescription and over-the-counter

These medicines are inexpensive and as effective and safe as other NSAIDs when used appropriately. Both are available as both prescription and non-prescription drugs.

But be aware: many cough and cold combination products contain ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen. If you already take an NSAID for pain and need to take a cold remedy, check to make sure it does not interact with your NSAID and that you are not exceeding the maximum daily amount for the particular NSAID.

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Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. These materials were made possible by a grant from the state Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program, which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin (gabapentin).




















## Options in Treating Osteoarthritis

Health Status and Risks	Options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ No or low GI risk<sup>1</sup></li> <li>■ No heart or stroke risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Generic ibuprofen or naproxen</li> <li>■ Other NSAID with lowest out-of-pocket cost for you</li> <li>■ Acetaminophen</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ GI risk</li> <li>■ No or low heart or stroke risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Acetaminophen</li> <li>■ Lowest effective dose of ibuprofen or naproxen (or other generic NSAID) plus a stomach acid reducer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Heart or stroke risk</li> <li>■ No or low GI risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Acetaminophen</li> <li>■ Aspirin plus a stomach acid reducer. Lowest effective dose of each drug.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Heart or stroke risk</li> <li>■ GI risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Acetaminophen plus aspirin for heart protection, with a stomach acid reducer</li> <li>■ Lowest effective dose of each drug</li> <li>■ Stay alert for signs of an ulcer: burning stomach pain, blood in stool, or black, tarry stools</li> </ul>

1. GI stands for gastrointestinal.

## NSAIDs: Price Comparison of Select NSAIDs (For full list, see complete report)\*

\$ indicates the dose of that drug is available for a low monthly cost through programs offered by chain stores. For example, Kroger, Sam's Club, Target, and Walmart offer a month's supply of selected generic drugs for \$4 or a three-month supply for \$10. Other stores, such as Costco, CVS, Kmart, and Walgreens, offer similar programs. Some programs have restrictions or membership fees, so check the details carefully for restrictions and to make sure your drug is covered.

Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name <sup>A</sup>	Drug is a Generic?	Frequency of Dose (per Day) <sup>B</sup>	Average Cost for Month's Supply <sup>C</sup>
Celecoxib 200 mg capsule	Celebrex	No	One	\$133
Diclofenac 50 mg tablet	Cataflam	No	Three	\$398
Diclofenac 50 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Three	\$136 
Diclofenac 1% topical gel	Voltaren gel	No	Max of 32 grams/day	\$302
Diclofenac 1.3% topical patch	Flector patch	No	Two patches	\$370 per each area
Diflunisal 250 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Two	\$49
Etodolac 400 mg extended release tablet	Generic	No	One	\$42 
Flurbiprofen 100 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Two	\$63
Ibuprofen 200 mg tablet	Advil <sup>D</sup>	OTC <sup>E</sup>	Eight	\$23
Ibuprofen 200 mg tablet	Motrin <sup>D</sup>	OTC <sup>E</sup>	Eight	\$23
 Ibuprofen 200 mg tablet	Generic <sup>D</sup>	OTC <sup>E</sup>	Eight	\$14
 Ibuprofen 400 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Four	\$15 
 Ibuprofen 600 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Four	\$21 
 Ibuprofen 800 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Three	\$19 
Indomethacin 50 mg capsule	Generic	Yes	Two	\$35 
Ketoprofen 50 mg capsule	Generic	Yes	Three	\$85 
Meclofenamate 50 mg capsule	Generic	Yes	Four	\$246
Meloxicam 15 mg tablet	Mobic	No	One	\$216
Meloxicam 15 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	One	\$148 
Nabumetone 500 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Two	\$70
 Naproxen 220 mg tablet	Aleve <sup>D</sup>	OTC <sup>E</sup>	Two	\$6
 Naproxen 220 mg tablet	Generic <sup>D</sup>	OTC <sup>E</sup>	Two	\$4
 Naproxen 250 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Two	\$46 
Naproxen 500 mg tablet	Naprosyn	No	Two	\$138
 Naproxen 500 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Two	\$71 
Naproxen 550 mg tablet	Anaprox DS	No	Two	\$214
Oxaprozin 600 mg tablet	Daypro	No	Two	\$181
Oxaprozin 600 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Two	\$90
Piroxicam 20 mg capsule	Feldene	No	One	\$149
Piroxicam 20 mg capsule	Generic	Yes	One	\$119 
Salsalate 500 mg tablet	Generic	Yes	Six	\$84

A. "Generic" means this is a generic drug, as noted in column three as well.

B. As commonly recommended or prescribed. Many NSAIDs must be taken multiple times per day. Convenience of dosing may be a factor for some patients. If switching from one NSAID to another, talk with your doctor about equivalency of dosing between the different NSAIDs. They come in a wide variety of recommended doses.

C. Monthly cost reflects national average retail prices for December 2010, rounded to the nearest dollar. Data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

D. This is a nonprescription medicine. Generic versions or store brand may be less expensive. Prices for these medications were obtained for 100-count packages from five major chain pharmacies (CVS, Rite Aid, Target, Walgreens, and Walmart) and local supermarkets across the U.S. in November 2010. The prices from the various stores were averaged to yield per-pill prices which were then converted into a monthly price for the given number of pills per day.

E. OTC stands for over-the-counter, meaning it is a nonprescription drug.