



Our Recommendations

If you have osteoarthritis or mild to moderate pain, you may need to take a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, or NSAID (pronounced en-sed). Almost 20 NSAIDs are available. They range in cost from about \$25 to \$280 per month. Most are now available as low-cost generic drugs. Four NSAIDs are also sold as nonprescription (over-the-counter) medicines in lower-dose formulations.

To help you and your doctor choose the right NSAID, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This two-page brief is a summary of a 15-page report you can access on the Internet at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

DO YOU NEED AN NSAID?

NSAIDs are widely used to treat mild to moderate pain—from arthritis, bursitis, tendinitis, and sprains, as well as premenstrual cramps, headache, backache, and minor injuries. They are also used to reduce fever, and are the most frequently prescribed treatment for osteoarthritis, a degenerative joint disease that causes pain, stiffness, and immobility. It afflicts about 21 million people in the U.S.

NSAIDs are effective medicines, but they may be overused. They have been at the center of a two-year controversy. Two NSAIDs – Vioxx and Bextra—have been removed from the market. And the Food and Drug Administration in April 2005 issued an important warning about the use and safety of all NSAIDs. They can cause stomach ulcers and gastrointestinal bleeding. And when used over long periods, especially at high doses, all NSAIDs *may* raise the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Options in Treating Osteoarthritis Pain

Risks		Options
Stomach risk? Heart or stroke risk?	No No	• Generic ibuprofen, naproxen or salsalate • Other NSAID with low out-of-pocket cost for you • Acetaminophen (Panadol, Tylenol)
Stomach risk? Heart or stroke risk?	Yes No	• Acetaminophen • Lowest possible dose of ibuprofen, naproxen or salsalate (or other generic NSAID) plus a stomach acid reducer
Stomach risk? Heart or stroke risk?	No Yes	• Acetaminophen • Aspirin plus a stomach acid reducer. Lowest dose possible
Stomach risk? Heart or stroke risk?	Yes Yes	• Acetaminophen plus aspirin for heart protection, with stomach acid reducer. Lowest dose of each drug possible. Stay alert to signs of ulcer.

Regular exercise and stretching, as well as other nondrug treatments, could reduce your need for pain medicines, which are often overused.

If you need medicine for chronic pain, talk with your doctor about trying acetaminophen (Panadol, Tylenol) first, before an NSAID. It poses no risk of stomach or heart problems and is only slightly less effective than an NSAID.

If you and your doctor decide you need an NSAID, your risk of stomach or heart problems should be assessed and your treatment tailored to your risk. The table on this page offers some treatment options. We urge these cautions:

- If you have ever had a stomach ulcer or bleeding, or are at high risk of either, it would be best to avoid NSAIDs if you can. Be aware as well that the risk of bleeding from NSAIDs use increases with age.
- If you have heart disease or are at risk of heart attack or stroke, talk with your doctor about the potential risks of taking any NSAID regularly for long periods.
- If you have to take an NSAID, take the lowest dose that brings relief, and take it for the shortest period you can.

Many low-cost NSAIDs are available. They could save you \$180 per month (\$2,160 a year) or more. Taking effectiveness, safety, and cost into account, we have chosen three generic prescription NSAIDs as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*:

- **Ibuprofen**—costing an average \$26 to \$30 per month
- **Naproxen**—costing an average \$44 to \$50 per month
- **Salsalate**—costing an average \$26 to \$35 per month

If you do not have health insurance or drug coverage and you need to take an NSAID only every once in a while for relief of mild pain or osteoarthritis, talk with your doctor about taking these low-cost nonprescription drugs: Aspirin (Bayer, Bufferin), naproxen (Aleve), or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, Nuprin).

Don't take high doses of these medicines for more than a few days without consulting a doctor.

NSAIDs can interact with other medicines to cause serious side effects. If your doctor prescribes an NSAID, tell him or her about any other medicine or dietary supplement you are taking.

See the cost comparison table on the other side.
 The information in this brief was last updated in June 2005.

NSAID Cost Comparison—Examples¹

	Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name (s)	Drug is a Generic	Frequency of Dose ²	Average Cost for Month's Supply ³
	Celecoxib 100mg	Celebrex	No	Two	\$132
	Celecoxib 200 mg	Celebrex	No	Two	\$214
	Diclofenac 50mg	Voltaren, Cataflam	No	Three	\$212
	Diclofenac 50mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$62
	Diclofenac Long-Acting 100mg	Voltaren-XR	No	One	\$166
	Diclofenac Long-Acting 100mg	Generic	Yes	One	\$73
	Etodolac 200mg	Lodine	No	Three	\$170
	Etodolac 200mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$84
	Flurbiprofen 100mg	Ansaid	No	Three	\$282
	Flurbiprofen 100mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$63
	Ibuprofen 400mg	Motrin	No	Three	\$34
CR BEST BUY	Ibuprofen 400mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$26
	Ibuprofen 200mg	Advil	OTC ⁴	Six	\$14
CR BEST BUY	Ibuprofen 600mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$29
	Ibuprofen 800mg	Motrin	No	Three	\$53
CR BEST BUY	Ibuprofen 800mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$30
	Indomethacin 75mg Sustained release	Indocin SR	No	Two	\$151
	Indomethacin 75mg Sustained release	Generic	Yes	Two	\$68
	Ketoprofen 75mg	Orudis	No	Two	\$60
	Ketoprofen 75mg	Generic	Yes	Two	\$48
	Meloxicam 7.5mg	Mobic	No	One	\$111
	Meloxicam 15mg	Mobic	No	One	\$157
	Naproxen 500mg	Naprosyn	No	Three	\$187
CR BEST BUY	Naproxen 500mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$50
	Naproxen 220mg	Aleve	OTC ⁴	Six	\$20
	Salsalate 750mg	Disalcid	No	Three	\$74
CR BEST BUY	Salsalate 750mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$26
CR BEST BUY	Salsalate 750mg	Generic	Yes	Four	\$35
	Sulindac 200mg	Clinoril	No	Two	\$94
	Sulindac 200mg	Generic	Yes	Two	\$41
	Tolmetin 400mg	Tolectin DS	No	Three	\$151
	Tolmetin 400mg	Generic	Yes	Three	\$101

UNDERSTANDING GENERICS: A generic drug is one that is sold under its generic name—for example, in this table diclofenac is the generic version of the brand-name drug Voltaren and naproxen is the generic version of the brand-name drug Naprosyn. Column 3 in this table tells you if the drug listed is available as a generic or not.

(1) This is a sampling of NSAIDs at some commonly used doses. For a more comprehensive list, you can download the full and recently updated 15-page NSAIDs report at www.CRBESTBUYDrugs.org.

(2) In various doses, as commonly recommended or prescribed.

(3) Monthly costs are based on nationwide retail average prices for March 2005, rounded to nearest dollar; data provided by NDCHealth, a health-care information company.

(4) This is a nonprescription (over-the-counter, or OTC) drug.