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Pills Not Helping Your Pain? Creams, Patches Effective Too

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By Jessica Doyle



Can't get rid of that throbbing pain in your shoulder?

If you have been popping pills for the past week in order to treat your pain, one expert said you might be going about your pain treatment plan all wrong.

"Nerve pain and tendinitis are difficult to treat by mouth," said **Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum**, medical director of the Fibromyalgia and Fatigue Centers and author of the book "Pain-Free 1-2-3".

"Topical pain creams are more effective and you can see results within a half-hour, with marked results within two weeks."

According to Teitelbaum, these are just some of the benefits of topical pain creams:

- They are effective in treating tension headaches;
- You can take high doses of it without getting the usual side effects;
- Many can be purchased over the counter.

If you are interested in trying a topical pain reliever, here is what you need to know about the different types of creams. It's also important to know that most of these creams come in patch form, which Teitelbaum said is a more effective way of receiving the medicine.

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As always, check with your health care provider to before trying anything new.

OVER-THE-COUNTER CREAMS

Menthol creams

These creams often have a “hot” or “cold” feeling and are made with menthol in an alcohol-base, Teitelbaum said.

Examples: Biofreeze, IcyHot

Aspirin creams

Some topical pain relievers contain salicylates, the some ingredient that gives aspirin its pain-relieving qualities, according to the Mayo Clinic’s [Web site](#).

These creams are beneficial because they can reduce joint inflammation.

Examples: Bengay, Aspercreme

Hot pepper creams

“Capsaicin creams are made out of hot peppers,” Teitelbaum said. “The thought is that by rubbing the cream over the painful area, it will decrease the pain. It sounds counterintuitive to me, so I’m not a big fan of it, but it is an option for some people.”

These creams work by reducing your body’s nerves of a chemical P transmitter, which sends pain signals to your body.

Examples: Capzasin, Zostrix

PRESCRIPTION CREAMS

Prescription pain creams containing nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs work well for arthritis sufferers, according to the Mayo Clinic’s Web site.

One example is diclofenac, which is available in a few different forms: as a gel (Voltaren) and as a patch (Flector).

Teitelbaum said he likes giving patients lidocaine patches, a numbing agent, if the patient has localized pain. It is known as Lidoderm.

Some patients take a combination of pain medicine to treat their pain orally, for instance, pain relievers, antidepressants and anticonvulsants, Teitelbaum said.

So it is possible for compound pharmacies to make creams that contain a mixture of these medicines as well.

No matter how you decide to treat your pain, Teitelbaum urges patients not to ignore it — even if they are not finding immediate relief.

“One in four Americans is in chronic pain, and most are not treated adequately,” Teitelbaum said. “Most physicians are not equipped to treat it. Pain is like the oil light on your dashboard, it’s telling you something is wrong and your body needs attention.”

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