A guide to common OTC pain relief treatments

With so many different options to choose from, this chart can help you recommend the most effective OTC pain relief medications for your patients based on their type of pain.¹ The advice summarized in this chart is based on scientific evidence in current, published clinical treatment guidelines and peer-reviewed literature.

The highlighted area indicates it is recommended as first-line treatment.

OTC Pain Relief Comparison Chart

Key:

Pain type **OTC** analgesics **Topical diclofenac Oral Ibuprofen** Acetaminophen Mild to **Moderate Pain** (x) Musculoskeletal (MSK) pain (x) Osteoarthritis #1 for knee OA pain \checkmark Headache (×) *`*Bi **Dental pain** (x) $(\)$ Ŵ Migraine (x) (x) Dvsmenorrhoea (period pain) (x) \checkmark Acute back pain (x) (~) (i)

in case of:

Use OTC cautiously

Other concurrent medications, including natural remedies 

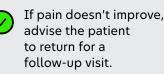
Pre-existing medical conditions

Smoking/alcohol consumption



Things to remember:

- Begin with an effective pain relief product at the lowest dose for the shortest duration needed.
 - Alert patients to maximum daily doses and the potential for overmedicating with multiple products.



OTC options recommended in treatment guidelines for the management of pain²⁴

Type of Pain	First-line recommendation	Corresponding Association(s)
Migraine	NSAIDs (including aspirin), non-opioid analgesics, acetaminophen, or caffeinated analgesic combinations* (eg, aspirin+acetaminophen+caffeine) for mild-to-moderate migraines. ^{1,2}	American Headache Society & American Academy of Family Physicians
) Osteoarthritis	Topical NSAIDs for the treatment of knee OA and Oral NSAIDs. ^{4,5}	American College of Rheumatology & Osteoarthritis Research Society International
Acute back pain	NSAIDs for the treatment of acute, non-specific low back pain. ⁷	- American College of Physicians
Dental pain	NSAIDs for mild to moderate pain and a fixed-dose combination of ibuprofen & acetaminophen for moderate to severe pain as they are shown to be more effective at reducing pain than opioid analgesics. ⁶	- American Dental Association
Menstrual pain	– NSAIDs for primary dysmenorrhea. ⁸	- American Academy of Family Physicians
Headache	— NSAIDs and acetaminophen. ^{1,2} ——	- National Headache Foundation
の Musculoskeletal つ pain (MSK)	Topical NSAIDs, with or without menthol gel, should be used as first line therapy for adults with acute pain from non-low back, musculoskeletal injuries. Oral NSAIDs and acetaminophen may be considered. ³	American Academy of Family Physicians & American College of Physicians
General acute	NSAIDs for proven efficacy and cost, acetaminophen is an alternate option.	- American Academy of Family Physicians

*Only FDA approved OTC products for migraine

References: 1. Mayans, Laura, Walling, Anne Walling. Acute Migraine Headache: Treatment Strategies. *Am Fam Physician*. 2018;97(4):243-251. 2. American Headache Society. The American Headache Society Position Statement On Integrating New Migraine Treatments Into Clinical Practice. 2018, Dec 10. https://doi.org/10.1111/head.13456. 3. Gaseem, Amir, McLean, Robert M., et al. Nonpharmacologic and Pharmacologic Management of Acute Pain From Non-Low Back, Musculoskeletal Injurise in Adults: A Clinical Guideline From the American College of Physicians and American Academy of Family Physicians. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 2020;173(9):739-748. 4. Bannuru, RR, Osani M C, et al. OARSI guidelines for the non-surgical management of knee, hip, and polyarticular osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis and Cartilage 2019;27(11):1578-1589. *Epub* 2019 Jul 3. 5. Kolasinski, Sharon L. Neogi, Tuhina, et al. 2019 American College of Rheumatology/Arthritis Foundation Guideline for the Management of Osteoarthritis of the Hand, Hip, and Knee. *Arthritis & Rheumatology* 2020;72 220-233. 6. American Dental Association. *Oral Analgesics for Acute Dental Pain*. 2022, Sept 6. Available from HYPERLINK "https://www.ada.org/en/resources/research/science-and-research-institute/oral-health-topics/oral-analgesics-for-acute-dental-pain" Oral Analgesics for Acute Dental Pain | American Dental Association (ada.org) 7. Kinkade, Scott Evaluation of Treatment of Acute Low Back Pain. *Am Fam Physician*. 2005;71(5):913-918.

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