Topical NSAIDs are probably effective for knee and hand osteoarthritis

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THE PROBLEM: Osteoarthritis is a pain for patients and health professionals. Some patients get relief from oral paracetamol while others do not. Some get benefit from oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), but prescribers get twitchy over the issues of gastrointestinal irritation and renal damage. The idea of low-dose NSAIDs is attractive and the topical formulation is one option. Oral piroxicam is now available in New Zealand but costs more than $1 per pill (per day).

CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE: This review shows that topical NSAIDs are better than placebo for knee and hand osteoarthritis.

Treatments for osteoarthritis in knees and hands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topical NSAID vs placebo</th>
<th>Effective: For ≥50% pain relief over 8–12 weeks compared with placebo</th>
<th>Cochrane review¹</th>
<th>No major harms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>NNT = 6.4 for solution; NNT = 11 for gel formulation</td>
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<td>Best evidence is for topical diclofenac</td>
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<td>8 and 27% get better as placebo response</td>
<td>NNT = numbers needed to treat. An NNT of 6 means that for every 6 people given the treatment, 1 person will find the treatment effective.</td>
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Reference


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