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Allergy to Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs



What are NSAIDs?

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) are a group of medications that are often prescribed for strong pain relief, or to treat various types of inflammation.

What are examples of NSAIDs?

This is a list of commonly prescribed NSAIDs in Singapore. Note that this list does not include all NSAIDs.

- Aspirin
- Diclofenac (e.g. Voltaren, Cataflam)
- Mefenamic acid (e.g. Ponstan)
- Ibuprofen (e.g. Brufen, Nurofen)
- Indomethacin (e.g. Indocid)
- Naproxen (e.g. Synflex, Naprosyn)
- Ketorolac (e.g. Toradol)

What are the symptoms of NSAID allergy?

The most common reaction to NSAIDs is urticaria (otherwise known as hives or wheals) or swelling of your eyelids and lips.

NSAIDs can also cause reactions such as itchy red rashes over your whole body, eye inflammation, or ulcers in your mouth, tongue, or genitals.

NSAIDs may also cause an unusual allergy called a "fixed drug eruption". This means you develop a red or purple, circular patch in the same area of the skin whenever you consume an NSAID.

Paracetamol (e.g. Panadol) is a weak NSAID and may also cause eyelid or lip swelling in some people.

Even NSAIDs in the form of gels and plasters (such as Ketoprofen) may cause a similar reaction if you are extremely sensitive to these medicines.

Your allergist will advise you whether you need to avoid all the NSAIDs, or just a specific one.

What precautions do I need to take if I have NSAID allergy?

- Check with the pharmacist when buying over the counter medications to ensure that these do not contain NSAIDs or paracetamol (if you are sensitive to paracetamol).
- Do not take traditional medicines if you are not sure about their contents.
- Use physical forms of relief for fever such as drinking a lot of fluids, using cold sponges and cold compresses if you cannot take paracetamol.

Although selective COX-2 inhibitors are possible alternatives such as celecoxib (Celebrex) and etoricoxib (Arcoxia), some people who are extremely sensitive to NSAID may also develop similar reactions. You should undergo a drug test to COX-2 inhibitor and not try them on your own.