

[IMAGE]

Some Like It Hot

The two most popular nonprescription medications in the U.S. - ibuprofen (i.e., Advil) and acetaminophen (i.e., Tylenol) - have been promoted as "first-line" management of acute low back pain. These analgesics may cause potential kidney, stomach, and liver problems, however. Self-administered topical heat wraps may offer a drug-free alternative treatment for acute back pain.

In a recent study in the journal *Spine*, the authors compared eight hours/day of low-level topical heat therapy with maximal recommended dosages of ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Pain, muscle stiffness, disability, and back flexibility were compared in almost 400 people with back pain, ages 18-55, over two days of therapy and two days of follow-up.

Heat-wrap therapy was more effective than either drug. Heat wraps were significantly more effective than ibuprofen and acetaminophen in terms of self-reported pain relief. In the heat-wrap group, back flexibility was greater, and disability and muscle stiffness were lessened to a greater degree.

Based on these findings, continuous low-level heat-wrap therapy may be better than painkillers for acute back pain. Your doctor of chiropractic can tell you more about this noninvasive, drug-free pain treatment, which involves simply wrapping a Velcro belt with a heating element around your torso.

Reference:

Nadler SF, Steiner DJ, Erasala GN, et al. Continuous low-level heat wrap therapy provides more efficacy than ibuprofen and acetaminophen for acute low back pain. *Spine* 2002;27(10), pp. 1012-1017.

For more information on back pain, go to <http://www.chiroweb.com/tyh/backpain.html>

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