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Arthritis patients are taking too many painkillers - raising their risk of internal bleeding, heart attack and stroke

- Arthritis patients in the UK are risking their health by taking too many painkillers, scientists have warned.
- A new study found almost one in five sufferers are taking two anti-inflammatories to manage their condition, putting themselves at risk of side effects including gastric bleeds, heart attack and stroke.
- The research found 97 per cent of patients with osteoarthritis had restricted movement - and more than seven out of 10 had reduced mobility, with some almost unable to move at all.
- Those afflicted by the condition struggle with everyday activities including walking, climbing the stairs and taking part in sports

The study, carried out by Arthritis UK, Lloyds Pharmacy and nanotechnology firm Pro Bono Bio, revealed 90 per cent of respondents were taking drug-based medicines.

And three-quarters used more than one treatment to manage their condition.

Yet almost half of those with OA complained of side effects, as a result of their medication, with almost nine in 10 worried about the complications.

Osteoarthritis affects nearly nine million people in Britain and costs the NHS £5.2 billion-a-year in direct healthcare costs, according to the charity Arthritis Research UK.

Dr Liam O'Toole, CEO of Arthritis Research UK, said: 'The findings of this survey highlight the debilitating pain that the one in six people with arthritis in the UK are facing every day.

'Pain is one of the main symptoms of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions. For some people, the pain is long-lasting and interferes with their daily life, stopping them doing the things they enjoy.

'All of our work is focused on taking the pain away from people who have arthritis so that they remain active, doing the things that they love.

The aim of the research was to better understand the impact the condition has on patients' lives, and help determine the use of those treatments currently available.

It found doctors and patients struggle to control the pain and stiffness caused by OA, a disease for which there is currently no cure.

In total 440 people with the condition, took part in the study over a four-month period from January to May this year.

Of those surveyed, 61 per cent had officially been diagnosed with OA.

They ranged in age from 20 to 90 years, with the majority in the over-50s bracket.

Almost nine out of 10 were female and the knee was the most affected joint.

Of those with OA, 57 per cent were taking a pain pill from the class of medication known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories or NSAIDs.

These include aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, celecoxib and diclofenac - some are prescribed, others can be bought over the counter in pharmacies and supermarkets.

The report states: 'This class of medicine is well known to cause side effects, especially in patients who have risk factors.'

'These risk factors include being elderly, having conditions such as high blood pressure, having ulcers, having had a previous heart attack or taking certain other medications.'

'Extremely worrying is the significant number of patients (19 per cent) who report that they are taking two oral NSAIDs at the same time.'

Ninety per cent of respondents showed interest in a new drug-free treatment, proven to be effective against pain and stiffness, but has none of the side-effects of NSAIDs.

PATIENT SAYS NEW ARTHRITIS GEL HAS 'CHANGED MY LIFE'

One osteoarthritis patient who took part in the survey, Pat Fuller, 73, of Tyne and Wear, said: 'I have arthritis all over my body, but it's worst in my knees. I couldn't walk and I couldn't sleep from the pain.'

'It looked like I'd have to either have knee replacements or cease to live on my own, and I didn't want to go down the route of operations.'

'Five years ago I had a triple bypass and I don't recover very well from operations, so I really didn't want to have the knees done, but now, because I'm using the new gel, I don't have to.'

'I can now keep the pain away and have my mobility back — and I'm enjoying a proper night's sleep.'

The treatment, Flexiseq, was launched by Arthritis Research UK in December.

Dr John Dickson, GP and a co-founder of the Primary Care Rheumatology Society, said: 'I read with interest the findings of this survey as they clearly reflect my experience that many patients continue to live with terrible pain and stiffness, despite trying many available treatments.'

'These patients are looking for new options, and the new treatment, Flexiseq, may well be the answer for many of them.'

'Flexiseq is a drug-free gel, gives comparable pain relief to the oral NSAIDs and has an excellent safety profile.'

'I am recommending it to my patients, and use it myself on the painful arthritic joints in my hands.'

Michael Earl, of Flexiseq manufacturers Pro Bono Bio, said: 'This survey demonstrates the real need that patients and doctors have for effective and safer treatment options.

'Flexiseq, which is drug-free and has been shown to be as effective as a leading pain tablet, celecoxib, is already being used by many patients and we are delighted by the positive feedback we are getting from these users and from healthcare professionals.'

Nitin Makadia, pharmacist and pain expert at LloydsPharmacy, said: 'The results of the survey show a greater need for support and information around medicine management for those living with osteoarthritis.

'At LloydsPharmacy we have taken our support for these patients one step further by offering a pain service that gives patients the opportunity to discuss their pain concerns and get advice from a pharmacist about how they can manage their pain, not just with medication but also through lifestyle changes.'

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For further information please contact:

John Mayo
Pro Bono Bio
+44 20 7291 5456
karen.frost@pbbio.com

Michael Earl
Pro Bono Bio
+44 20 7291 5446
lucy.parker@pbbio.com

About Pro Bono Bio:

Pro Bono Bio plc is the world's leading nanotechnology company offering health and lifestyle products, headquartered in London with operations in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia. Pro Bono Bio's first product, Flexiseq gel, is a medical device that safely targets joint pain by a unique drug-free lubricating action. It was launched in 2012 and is currently available in the UK, Irish Republic, Germany, France, Malta, South Africa, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore