Fish oil replaces NSAIDS

Being a successful massage therapist depends partly on being in good physical condition. Massage is, after all, physically demanding work. Even with proper body use, one of the most common ailments afflicting people of any profession is back pain. It's widely regarded as one of the most common reasons for visits to the doctor and the most common reason for missing work.

Back pain has traditionally been treated with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs), such as Vioxx and Celebrex. Such drugs work by blocking the production of body chemicals that cause inflammation. But those medications can have serious side effects for some people, including increased risk for heart attack, stroke and ulcers.

Thus, some doctors tout a more natural solution to this common problem: fish oil. Consuming omega-3 oils, commonly found in fish, could reduce inflammation, such as the kind that causes chronic neck and back pain, said Joseph Maroon, M.D., a board-certified neurosurgeon at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Centers. “Omega-3s act to block inflammation using the same pathways as NSAIDs do, but they are generally safer and with far fewer side effects,” he said.

Maroon, who co-authored the book Fish Oil: The Natural Anti-Inflammatory, became interested in using omega-3 oils after suffering joint and muscle pain. He initially took NSAIDs for the pain, but developed an ulcer. He then researched natural alternatives, which led him to fish oil. After taking it himself, he began recommending it to patients, 60 percent of whom were able to stop taking NSAIDs and use just fish oil for their pain. Upon further research, he learned fish oil can help with a variety of other conditions, including diabetes, vascular disease and stroke.

Fish oil needs to be taken up to four weeks to achieve the anti-inflammatory effects. And it can be harmful to patients taking blood thinners, if used in high doses. Maroon recommends consulting a physician for the proper dosage and to see if it's right for you.

—Amanda Cuda