

## Inflaming the pain

Anti-inflammatory medications cause more harm than good after injuries

For many athletes and exercising students, pain-relief medicine becomes an essential part of the routine after a long workout. Over-the-counter drugs available for treating aching muscles and stiff joints fall into two categories: those containing acetaminophen such as Tylenol, or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, known as NSAIDs. Some well-known examples of these are Advil, Aleve, Orudis and aspirin.



MIDHAT FAROOQI

Currently, NSAIDs are the most widely used drugs in the United States, with almost \$2 billion spent on them annually. Sports medicine experts agree that NSAIDs are by far the first choice among doctors and athletes for treatment of sports injuries. However, recent research has shown that NSAIDs are not very effective at healing certain injuries, and that chronic use leads to serious side effects.

Student athletes and exercising Aggies should not automatically rely on NSAIDs whenever they are in pain.

Declan Connolly, an associate professor of exercise physiology at the University of Vermont, said there are two different types of soreness: acute pain due to bumps and bruises and the pain one feels the day after a workout. "If somebody plays a contact sport — rugby, lacrosse, hockey — and they get a few whacks, yes, ibuprofen (an NSAID) is effective," he said. However, he believes these drugs do little for the casual athlete who plays a few hours of tennis, then awakens the following day feeling sore. Connolly has also questioned the use of NSAIDs in treating athletic injuries.

Most athletes and exercising students suffer from muscle injuries, ligament sprains, tendon injuries or low-back pain at some point, and NSAIDs are commonly recommended to treat such ailments. Yet, when Connolly and his colleagues reviewed the scientific evidence, they found that little research has been done regarding the healing properties of NSAIDs.

The "beneficial" effects of NSAIDs are unproven, but the perception holds that since inflammation is at the root of exercise-related pain, stopping it will bring relief and help a tissue heal faster.

Inflammation is a necessary part of the healing process. When a tissue is injured, the body responds by increasing blood flow and inflammatory cells in the region. These cells remove debris and recruit factors to the injury site. The same molecules that are blocked by NSAIDs are responsible, in part, for producing this inflammatory phase after an injury. While inflammation may be able to occur without healing, healing cannot take place very successfully

without inflammation. NSAIDs may be potent pain-relievers, but they don't shorten healing time.

Theoretically, then, NSAIDs delay the healing of common sports injuries, so athletes relying on these medications to relieve their injuries are actually doing themselves more harm than good.

Researchers at Stanford have already shown that some NSAIDs prevent bone growth in animals, which shows they can do damage. And, interestingly, researchers at the Yale School of Medicine have found that anabolic steroids — drugs that actually increase inflammation — hasten the healing of muscle injuries in mice.

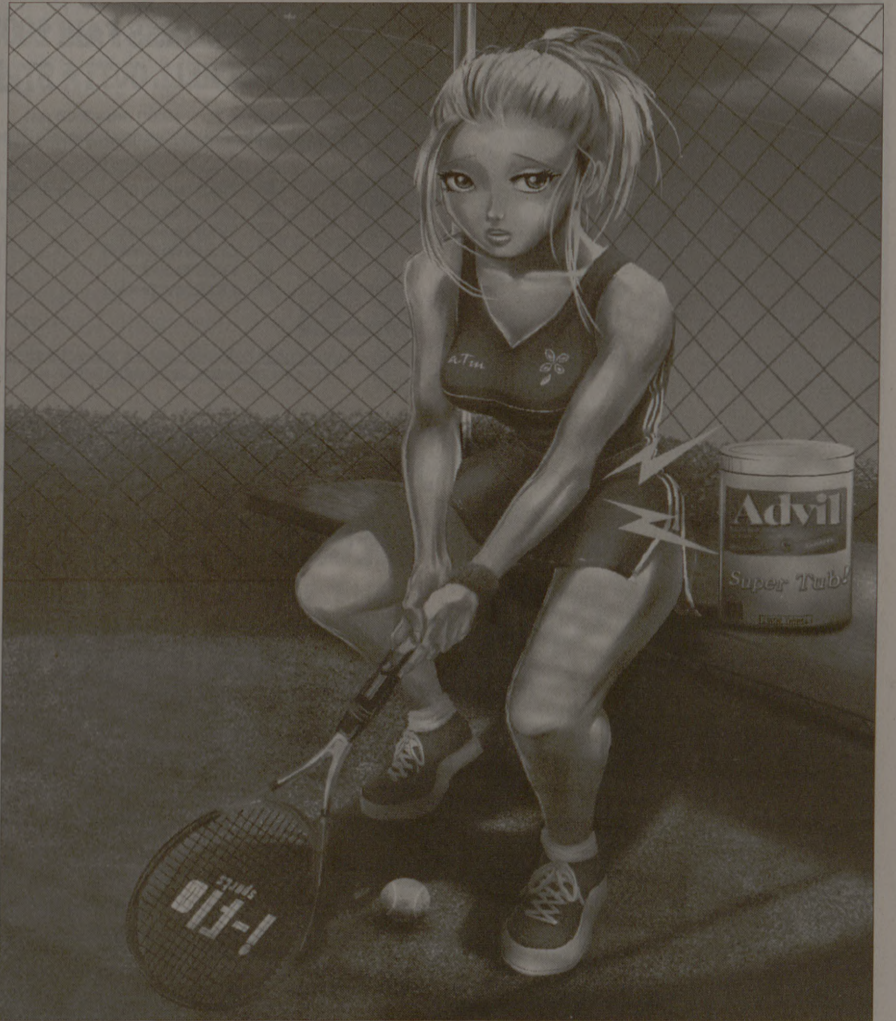
One may argue that since NSAIDs are excellent at reducing pain, they encourage activity of an injured joint. It is well-known that controlled movement of sprains tends to shorten healing times. Thus, NSAIDs may provide some therapeutic benefit. However, it is unknown whether a similar effect could be obtained with other substances that have fewer side effects and cost less, such as ice.

Furthermore, prolonged use of NSAIDs has serious side effects, which may include gastrointestinal ulcers and bleeding, dehydration, high-blood pressure and kidney failure.

Gastrointestinal bleeding after NSAID use is the 15th leading cause of death in the United States. Plus, individuals who have such bleeding while taking NSAIDs have a significantly higher mortality than those who are not taking these drugs. This is because NSAIDs increase the time it takes for clotting to occur.

There is evidence that many competitive athletes abuse these drugs to reduce the pain of their strenuous training. A survey of athletes at the 2000 Sydney Olympics found that nearly one-third of them used these drugs in inappropriate doses or for a prolonged time to reduce pain and inflammation.

Steven D. Stovitz, director of sports-medicine education at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, says even sporadic use of NSAIDs should be a red flag. "Perhaps the pain from a once-a-week basketball game should indicate that someone is



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not in shape," he said. The best way to be pain-free is to open the medicine bottle less and the gym door more.

Midhat Farooqi is a senior genetics major.

## Medical journals finally requiring accountability

Medical researchers have failed the public and become advertisers rather than scientists by giving money-blinded, biased opinions on new products. Until recently, journals have allowed this by requiring only writers of research reports — and not the more influential review articles — to disclose financial interests in the products and treatments reviewed, according to The New York Times.



LINDSAY ORMAN

While this may sound like a small technicality, the loophole has allowed unethical conflicts of interest that should outrage an informed public. For instance, The Times reported that a 2002 Nature Neuroscience article advocated three therapies for depression — a "promising" lithium patch patented by the author, an "effective" drug produced by a company in which the author owned 60,000 shares of stock and another product manufactured by a company in which the author was a board member and received stock options and consulting fees.

In essence, the public has been trusting information on health care that comes from researcher's wallets.

At the urging of 32 concerned scientists, Nature Publishing Group made public its new

policy of complete financial disclosure for reviews, as well as primary research reports in the October issue of Nature Neuroscience, according to The Associated Press.

While Nature executive editor Charles Jennings agreed to new disclosure policies, he also stressed in The Boston Globe that "nobody should be embarrassed about commercializing their work. It's a tremendous engine for economic growth."

Expensive medical research certainly benefits from the monetary backing of companies interested in seeing their products reviewed favorably, but by not disclosing sources of financial support, the public is severely misled into thinking results are purely objective.

Already a step ahead of its London-based counterpart, America's leading journal, Science, currently requires disclosure of financial interests for primary research reports, reviews and even opinion essays. However, the 32 scientists included Science in their appeal for higher ethical standards, so one can infer that stricter policies are required there as well to ensure fact-driven rather than money-driven endorsements and evaluations.

Furthermore, conflicts of financial interest are not restricted to journals, pointing to a broader problem tainting the entire medical field.

Earlier this year, the world's leading association of cancer doctors, The American Society of Clinical Oncology, issued a similar impera-

tive to curb unethical practices. As of April, cancer researchers must now disclose financial support from trial sponsors, and efforts are being made to limit the financial stakes for clinical trial leaders, according to The Houston Chronicle.

Dr. Lowell Schnipper, who chaired the task force responsible for the new policy, told The Chronicle that "the rationale behind the new policy is the national abuses that came to light in recent years. While we remain confident in the integrity of clinical investigators, the goal of this policy is to increase the transparency of clinical cancer research overall."

The problem is not that researchers are publishing incorrect or altered findings; it is that they are not providing the public with the entire story. Because the majority of people do not have the ability or resources to perform research firsthand, they have to trust researchers to provide them with accurate evaluations. Furthermore, evaluations published in medical journals may influence doctors' or clinics' choices in treatment.

A vulnerable public deserves treatment based on effectiveness, not on which company

pumps the most money into research that will yield positive findings.

Unfortunately, national attention and reform efforts were brought about only after irreparable damage. An 18-year-old died in a University of Pennsylvania gene therapy experiment, and Seattle's Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center neglected to tell patients of risks, according to The Chronicle.

While these new initiatives for reform will increase uniformity, accountability and objectivity in medical research, greater patient safety comes with a human cost even trial sponsors and companies seeking to advance their products cannot reimburse.

The public deserves to know whether researchers' medical findings are truly in the public's best interests or simply what is best for the researchers' wallets.

**"A vulnerable public deserves treatment based on effectiveness, not on which company pumps the most money into research that will yield positive findings."**

Lindsay Orman is a senior English major.

### Skyrocket does not deserve ridicule

In response to Collins Ezeanyim's Oct. 1 column:

If I have to listen to one more person whine about how much they hate Skyrocket, I think I'm going to scream. I'm pretty sure "Chigarooogarem" isn't intimidating, and I'm just about positive that "Riffity Riffity Riff Raff" makes us the butt of a lot of jokes, but do we care? No, because it's tradition, and so is Skyrocket — an old tradition that has just been rekindled, but a tradition nonetheless. What makes people think that they alone have the authority to decide what yells are good enough for this school? Isn't that why we elect Yell Leaders, to make those decisions and write us as a student body?

With all due respect to Mr. Ezeanyim, the logic used was ridiculous. Skyrocket isn't intimidating like the rest of our yells? I wasn't aware that "Rah Rah Rah TAMC" struck fear into the hearts of our enemies. The "Whistle-eeee" sounds silly? Whoops, I must have missed the past about "Hullabaloo Caneck Caneck" being sophisticated vocabulary. People don't know the words? Hardly anyone knows the words to the "Twelfth Man," but we still keep it around.

Stacy Reeves  
Class of 2006

### Kennedy should not be receiving award

Ted Kennedy is getting the Bush Public Service Award? Is Texas A&M saying that of all the people in this

country that do good public service, they could not find anyone better than Sen. Kennedy?

Putting it politely, Sen. Kennedy has questionable morals as well as other faults which most Aggies find offensive and in some cases revolting. Not to mention that Sen. Kennedy just outrageously accused President George W. Bush of fraud and bribery related to the Iraq war. The people at A&M who made this selection should be removed from that duty at once.

Was this just a publicity stunt? If so, shame on A&M for stooping so low. I am under no delusion that A&M will change its mind. But I would still like to know how A&M justifies overlooking all of Kennedy's faults to give him this award when there are hundreds of other people who would have been perfect recipients for this award.

If Texas A&M goes through with

this, they will sully the meaning of the award and shame the institution. I already have Aggie friends that are vowing to discontinue their financial support for the library and the University because of this.

James Wilson  
Class of 1995

### A&M about more than just academics

I am amazed at the recent bickering in regards to uncovering when we do yells at the football games and leaving early. When I first heard of Texas A&M and the unity among its student body, I was thoroughly impressed and knew I had to come here. As Aggies, we must evaluate why we are here. Yes, academics are a top priority.

After all, we attend one of the best universities for academics. We must also remember that A&M is unique because it has managed to keep its traditions and student unity over the past 127 years.

At no other university can a student meet so many people and befriend them for life simply because they go to the same school. Texas A&M also has amazing network opportunities because of its high percentage of student involvement and a friendly campus environment.

We have something special at A&M and it is called the Aggie Spirit. It is up to us to maintain that spirit so that future generations can experience it and learn what it means to be a Fightin' Texas Aggie.

Derek Brown  
Class of 2005

### MAIL CALL