

Vail Daily

Strained or sprained? Try the natural solution

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Now it's time to pray it's not serious.

When you get home, your black-and-blue knee sings like a choir every time you move it. The traditional way to treat the injury would be to pop a few ibuprofen and stick some ice on it.

That's partly right, says Dr. Deborah Wiancek, the only board-certified naturopathic physician in the Vail Valley. Wiancek is a licensed doctor, but unlike the traditional white coats, she stays away from chemicals. She replaced "take two and call me in the morning" with "an apple a day keeps the doctor away."

"With skiing injuries, strains and sprains are the biggest concern," said Wiancek, owner of a family practice in Edwards at the Riverwalk Natural Health Clinic. She's been featured recently in Ski Magazine for having ideas on how to treat injuries, without the normal side effects of drugs.

"The problem is, all drugs have side effects, especially for people with arthritis," she added. "You don't want to take those on a daily basis."

It's all about paying the P.R.I.C.E., she said. Protect the injured area. Rest it. Ice it as much as 15 minutes-per-hour. Compress it with a bandage. Elevate the area.

If you follow these steps, the swelling will go down and the damage will be minimal. While over-the-counter drugs can stop the swelling as well, Wiancek's first recommendation is Arnica, an herb found on Leopard's Bain plants in mountain areas. It comes in a gel form, a cream, or an oil, and can be applied topically to swelled joints.

"You should see significant results in 24 hours," she said.

Other natural ways to fight swelling include: Bromelin, an herb found on a pineapple tree that reduces swelling; Quercetin, a bio-flavenoid that comes from citrus fruits like blueberries and raspberries, that can be used with Bromelin; and Curcumin, an element that gives cumin its yellow color and can be found in most Indian spices.

While natural medicine is still on the incline, it still hasn't been as widely accepted as drugs like Tylenol and Advil. The lack of natural-medicine regulation by the Food and Drug Administration means you might not always get what you think you bought. So, before purchasing a Bromelin supplement, there are some questions to ask to the dealer. Ask about quality control.

"People don't always know what to believe," Wiancek said. "A study one day shows it prevents cancer, and, the next day, it causes cancer. When you look at studies, you want to look at who does the study, what part of the population is involved and are the variables controlled. You want a controlled study involving a large sample of the population."

And for those worried about altitude sickness, Wiancek has a cure for that too. Anti-oxidants like vitamin-C and vitamin-E help prepare the body for altitude and help prevent illnesses. Prevention, she said, is the key to staying healthy. Stretching before you ski, after you get off a long lift ride and drinking lots of water can be a significant tool for staying healthy this season.

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