

Should you take a painkiller before your COVID-19 vaccine?

February 18 2021, by Steven Reinberg Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—You finally managed to score an appointment to be

vaccinated against the new coronavirus and you're a little nervous about side effects, so taking a painkiller right before you get your shot seems like a smart idea.

Not so fast, says the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Instead, the agency is telling people not to take [pain medications](#) like Motrin, Advil or Tylenol before getting their COVID-19 vaccines.

Why?

It's possible that taking a painkiller before getting a [vaccine](#) will result in a "decrease in antibody response," explained Dr. Gregory Poland, director of the Vaccine Research Group at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Although the odds of a diminished [immune response](#) aren't really known, Poland said it's better to suffer the side effects than take the chance of making the vaccine less effective.

"After receiving the vaccine, if one develops symptoms that they feel they want to treat, it's fine, but ideally not before," he said. "Now, that's a recommendation by CDC, out of an abundance of caution."

There are exceptions, however: People who usually take pain relievers, such as migraine sufferers, should of course take their medication, he added.

"Go ahead and take it rather than end up with a full-blown migraine and end up in the ER having to get much more intensive or expensive therapy," Poland said.

He also noted that the aftereffects of the vaccine can differ between the two doses, with the effects after the second dose typically being worse.

"I'll tell you after my first dose, I had a little bit of a sore arm. After the second dose, I had a moderately severe sore arm, and I had four hours of shaking, chills with a 101-degree fever along with fatigue, headache and ringing in my ears. I took one dose of Tylenol, went to bed, woke up the next morning and was 80% to 90% better, and within that half-day, back to normal," Poland said.

These [side effects](#) are caused as the body's immune system revs up to fight the invader, which is just what's needed to produce the antibodies to blunt the virus.

Before getting vaccinated, people need to set their expectations appropriately, Poland said. "The symptoms are transient, they're self-resolving, they are not an indication that something's going wrong," he said. "If need be, go ahead and treat them."

The CDC also cautions against taking antihistamines like Zyrtec or Claritin before getting the COVID-19 vaccine, "because they could mask the onset or development of allergic or hypersensitivity reactions," Poland added.

Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a member of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, agrees that it's not a good idea to take a pain medication before getting a vaccine.

"My general belief on this is it's never a good idea to blunt fever, because fever is an adaptive part of your immune response," he said.

"Let your immune system do its job," Offit said. "The second dose was pretty rough. I had fatigue and fever, but I handled it by whining. Whining was my way of handling it."

More information: For more on the COVID-19 vaccines, head to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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Citation: Should you take a painkiller before your COVID-19 vaccine? (2021, February 18)
retrieved 5 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-painkiller-covid-vaccine.html>

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