



ADOBE STOCK

The right tool for the job

Know the different types of topicals.

BY HANNAH FELL

TYPICALLY, WHEN A PATIENT PRESENTS WITH PAIN, A chiropractor will treat the patient with a series of adjustments. Depending on the level of pain, the chiropractor might recommend massage therapy, physical therapy or a variety of supplements.

However, topical analgesics are another way to treat a client's pain, and they have the benefit of not causing side effects, which are more common with ingested medications. Additionally, topicals do not penetrate the skin deeply so the ingredients in the topical do not reach the bloodstream. This means that topical analgesics can provide pain

relief without impacting any internal organs.

The FDA views topical analgesics as over-the-counter drugs, which means they can be sold and used without the need for a prescription. Typically, these analgesics contain such active ingredients as menthol and capsaicin, which are FDA-regulated.

Cooling analgesics only contain menthol and can work well with a recent injury. Warming analgesics work well for people who have chronic pain, such as arthritis, regular lower-back pain, and even neuropathy and fibromyalgia. Warming analgesics have menthol, camphor and capsaicin.

Chiropractors will generally use

only the cooling approach when it comes to treating pain, but the use of a heating approach can be just as effective (if not more so).

"Using a cooling gel for all forms of pain is akin to using a hammer on both a nail and a screw," says Dan Sandweiss, COO of Sombra Professional Therapy Products. "It will drive a screw into wood, but the end result won't be effective. You need a diversified toolbox to help your patients."

How topical analgesics work

The gate theory of pain control is a great way to explain how topical analgesics work, Sandweiss says. Gate

theory states that there is an interconnection between small and large nerve fibers that determine how pain signals reach the brain.

These large and small fibers can respond to external stimuli, such as pain, and they send the pain signal to the brain. When a cooling or warming topical is used, it can cause some of these fibers to close the pain gateway and alleviate the discomfort.

Nerve cells contain transient receptor potential channels (TRPs). These receptors help to mediate hot or cold sensations and also work to block pain or mediate it, depending on the channel and external stimulus, Sandweiss says.

One of these channels, the TRPM8, is sensitive to cold, which means that menthol can override its pain signals to reduce the perceived pain in patients. The TRPV1 channel, he says, is heat sensitive, which means capsaicin and camphor can override its pain signals.

“If you are only using a cooling gel on a patient, you are only addressing the TRPM8 channel,” he says.

“However, if you have a warming gel in your office, you can address both the TRPM8 and the TRPV1 channels because warming gel contains menthol, camphor and capsaicin.”

It is important to remember that unless the topical you are using has some kind of anti-inflammatory ingredient, it will not treat or address the source of the pain.

Topicals in action

Michael Pridham is a DC with a practice in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He has been using topical analgesics in his practice for about eight years.

He says that he has used topical analgesics for pain ranging from sprains and strains to shingles pain, and his patients have noticed a significant reduction in their pain with topicals.

“Sprains and strains seem to do




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The first pain-relieving gel manufactured by Sombra Professional Therapy Products was its warm therapy. Chiropractors took to it immediately, seeing its effectiveness for relieving long-standing pain in their patients. Sombra's cool therapy came a few years later.

Both products contain natural citrus oils, orange in the warm therapy and lemon in the cool therapy. One of the major components of natural citrus oils is limonene, which is itself a pain reliever. It works on the TRPA1 receptor, which is one reason that Sombra natural pain-relieving gels are particularly effective. Sombra's natural ingredients target multiple TRP receptors.

Because chiropractors have helped the company become successful, Sombra is particularly supportive of them in return. A chiropractor can call the company during business hours and ask questions of its chemists. The company refrains from selling its Sombra-branded products in big box stores, which means patients need to buy from chiropractors. Also, Sombra has taken steps to prevent Internet marketplaces from undercutting chiropractors on price.

Sombra manufactures its products in its facility in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Its own staff assures quality and the company's founder comes to work every day to monitor operations. In this day of conglomerates and outsourcing, it is reassuring to know that Sombra's staff takes personal responsibility for the safety and quality of its natural pain-relieving gels.


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better with the cooling,” he says. “And longer-standing muscle soreness does better with the warming.”

In his practice, Pridham has treated and worked with a lot of current and former martial artists, and in particular he has worked with Jujitsu and Muay Thai athletes.

“One fighter hurt his knee as he was jumping into guard. He felt a bad pop in his knee and it ended up bruising the muscle,” Pridham says. The heating gel was beneficial to help

the pain. The topical in combination with kinesiotaping and injections got him back into competing.

The client ended up finding a lot of success in using the warming gels, he says, and ended up coming back into Pridham's office to purchase more of the product. 



HANNAH FELL is the associate editor of *Chiropractic Economics*. She can be reached at hfell@chiroeco.com, 905-567-1535 or through ChiroEco.com.