

The Better World News

Bill Kaysing Tribute Website

DMSO: The Best Injury Treatment You've Never Heard Of

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Injuries are the scourge of endurance athletes everywhere. It has been estimated that one out of every three athletes will suffer a significant repetitive use injury over the course of a year. Sometimes those injuries, if not quickly addressed, can become chronic and even debilitating. That's a lot of people with a lot of aches and pains.

Runners, swimmers, and cyclists are always looking for the best treatments for these injuries,

and usually the answer is the same... RICE... Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation. The idea behind RICE is to get the injured area stabilized and any inflammation and swelling under control. Once the inflammation is reduced, healing can commence. Of course, athletes being athletes, the Rest portion of the RICE recipe can be tough to swallow.

So it is that many have come to rely on anti-inflammatory medicines to help cope with both the pain as well as the healing process. Such medications range from the lowly but surprisingly effective aspirin, to more modern meds like Ibuprofen and Naproxin.

But one anti-inflammatory that used to be all the rage is Dimethyl Sulfoxide, more commonly known as DMSO.

If you are thinking to yourself "DMS-huh? you are not alone.

When I first mentioned DMSO on DailyMile some time back, the silence was deafening... Many DailyMilers are relatively new to the sport, and most have no idea what DMSO is. But when I first began running in the early 1980s, DMSO was touted as the magic bullet for most any running injury. Runners World wrote articles about it, and the advertising sections in the back of the magazine had many mail order houses offering it for sale. Word-of-mouth in the running community about its magical properties was strong. EVERYONE knew what DMSO was. In fact, there's even an entire book by Dr. Morton Walker about the healing powers of DMSO (see image at top of post).

So, what is it?

First off, unlike aspirin or Ibuprofen, DMSO is a topical ointment. It's applied to the skin over the injured area, and has the remarkable property of being able to absorb through the skin almost instantly. It's clear and colorless, and has been around for well over 100 years. Strictly speaking, it is an industrial solvent, but it's medicinal properties have been studied since the 1960s. It has also found use in the veterinary community as a liniment for race horses, but has never been FDA approved for human use as a general analgesic.

Some of how it works is well understood, while some things about it remain a bit mysterious. First and foremost, DMSO has the ability to quickly combine with

water. In an injury with pervasive inflammation, this can be key. Inflamed tissues are filled with water, and this inflammation can lead to more inflammation and further injury. DMSO can draw the water out of inflamed tissues and reduce swelling very quickly. This property also allows it to quickly absorb through the skin, and sometimes people will add other medications to it (such as aspirin) which will then “ride on the back” of the DMSO through the skin.

Secondly, DMSO seems to have strong analgesic properties and can be quite effective at reducing pain. In fact, DMSO has typically had a strong following among the severely arthritic who suffer extreme joint pain.

Despite the lack of FDA approval, DMSO is legal and is readily available and inexpensive. It's usually available at veterinary supply stores, and (ironically) sometimes at natural food and holistic medicine stores (it's actually available for purchase at Amazon.com). It's usually sold in a 99.9% pure gel suspension, although it sometimes also appears as a cream based product. So if this stuff is so great, how come you've never heard of it? And why won't the FDA approve it? Well, DMSO is not without some downside. First of all is the smell. It's not pretty. Imagine breaking open a fresh garlic clove and crushing it up in your hands. Well, that's about what DMSO smells like. The word “pungent” doesn't quite do it justice. And it's not just the odor. Because DMSO is so readily absorbed by the body, it leaves that same garlic taste in your mouth, and yes, can give you bad breath and make you sweat an essence of garlic as well. Pretty lovely, huh? If you can't stand your spouse, this might be your ticket to freedom... But for the rest of us, well, you've been warned.

The issue of FDA approval is largely speculative, but the general feeling seems to be that DMSO would not be a big money maker for pharmaceutical companies and as a result there has never been a big push to get approval. Many people say that if aspirin were introduced today, it too would suffer the same fate. It's hard to say for sure, but it seems pretty unlikely the FDA will ever approve it as a topical analgesic, although it is approved as a treatment for a bladder condition known as interstitial cystitis.

So the combination of bad odor, no FDA recognition, and improvements in other over-the-counter anti-inflammatory drugs may have served to ultimately push

DMSO to the back burner. However, in my experience I have found it can still be very useful. I bought a 16 ounce jar of DMSO over ten years ago when I was dealing with a knee injury. I don't use DMSO with any regularity, and still have about half of that original jar left. Some of what I have learned about this stuff:

It is most effective on soft tissue injuries, and generally speaking, the softer the better. For a stress fracture, don't waste your time. For tendonitis, eh, it might help a little. Joint pain (a knee or ankle, especially if there is swelling) it's pretty effective. For a muscle pull or tear, it's pure money. In fact, in it's 1980s heyday, it was primarily sprinters who raved about DMSO the most, since they were the most prone to muscle tears.

You can certainly tell this stuff is unusual as soon as you apply it. The skin gets an almost instantaneous sensation of warmth after application. Care must be taken to cleanse the area being treated since any impurities on the skin can be instantly carried to the blood stream via the DMSO. Within a minute or so, a garlic-like taste in the mouth appears.

I've recently had a problem with some bursitis in one of my heels. There is mild swelling involved, and I have seen the DMSO pull the swelling down to almost nothing within a couple of minutes.

DMSO is generally considered to be safe. It's reported to have low toxicity in and of itself, but there is very little data to indicate one way or another if it is safe over the long term. Care must be exercised in its handling, and it is certainly not to be taken orally. I generally won't apply it for more than every other day, although there's no hard and fast rule about frequency of use that I've ever found.

I'm certainly no doctor and can't personally vouch for the safety of DMSO, or recommend it in any medical sense*, but I am a runner who has dealt with numerous soft tissue injuries over the course of his running career. All I can say is that for me it has from time to time been very effective in treating some of my aches and pains. The fact that it isn't well known in the athletic community is really too bad since I do think it can play a role in keeping folks on the road.

[*The opinions stated in this article are those of the author alone, who is not a physician, and should not be taken as medical advice. As with any form of injury treatment, you should consult with your doctor prior to using DMSO,

particularly since it is not formally approved by the FDA as a treatment for soft tissue injuries. Use of DMSO is at your own risk. For more information about DMSO, visit <http://www.dmsso.org/>] (Source: <http://www.dailymile.com/blog/health/dmsso-the-best-injury-treatment-youve-never-heard-of>)

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