

When you're in pain, the last thing you need is to sort through the choices in the pain relief aisle at your local pharmacy. Aspirin and Tylenol, the old standards, have been joined by Advil, Motrin, Nuprin, Orudis KT — all claiming to Vanquish and Aleve pain.

It's enough to give you a headache. "What's it all mean?" you cry in exasperation.

Just about nothing, really, say the experts.

"This is a multibillion dollar industry — everyone has pains of one kind or another," says John Lech, a clinical pharmacy specialist at the Center for Drug Information at Mercy Hospital.

"Every company that can possibly get one of these on the market stands to gain," Lech says. "The difference is minimal — it's a marketing thing. I have to swallow when I see how gullible the American public is."

In fact, all those shelves full of bottles boil down to just five active ingredients: aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxin and ketoprofen. But sales in 1994 added up to a \$2,617 billion market.

Aspirin, or acetyl salicylic acid, hit the market in 1893 and quickly became

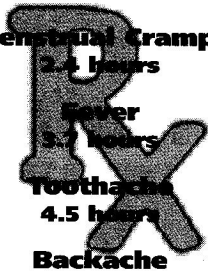
commadin, found that aspirin decreased the drug's efficacy. (Although for those taking aspirin to thin the blood, like some patients at risk for heart attacks, there is no substitute.)

But the stage was set for the introduction of acetaminophen, a compound chemically related to aspirin, but with different side groups, which became available over-the-counter in 1958. But while acetaminophen, a basic compound, was gentler on the stomach than aspirin, it wasn't an anti-inflammatory. Which meant that though fine for headaches, it did little for achy pain, like arthritis.

But it was competition.

"The aspirin companies came out

How Long People Wait Before They Seek Relief for Pain



Headache	7 minutes
Menstrual Cramps	2.4 hours
Fever	3.7 hours
Toothache	4.5 hours
Backache	6.4 hours
Muscular Aches	8 hours
Minor Arthritis	17 hours
Common Cold	23 hours

How Do You Spell Relief?

Actually, Any of a Number of Products Will Do Just Fine

By Lydia Strohl

the most widely used medication in the world. But the acid-based compound for treating pain and inflammation isn't always good on the stomach.

"In the '70s, stress was increasing, so consumption of aspirin was increasing, and with aspirin, side effects were found," says Jim Paone, owner of Wyman's Legend Pharmacy on the North Side. "In fact, people were using more of other types of drugs that aspirin interfered with."

Patients taking blood thinners, like

with their own versions — Anacin 3 is Tylenol," says Paone. "So the marketing wars started."

In May 1984, ibuprofen was brought over-the-counter, the first of a group called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs. Ibuprofen is the key ingredient in products such as Advil, Motrin and Nuprin, as well as a variety of generic brands. It combines pain relief and anti-inflammatory properties, and is generally gentler on the stomach than aspirin — making it

a popular alternative. Ibuprofen currently rules the OTC analgesic market, capturing \$599.5 million of the total market.

Of course, where there's a good idea, there's one better: In January 1994, naproxin, the active ingredient in Aleve, joined the NSAIDs available over-the-counter, and in October 1995 came ketoprofen, active in Orudis KT and Actron. Both are chemical cousins to ibuprofen.

The difference is in the dosing. Ketoprofen, the active ingredient in Actron and Orudis KT, takes a smaller dose — 12.5 mg as opposed to the standard 200 mg ibuprofen. Naproxin differs in that it is a long-acting NSAID, whereas ibuprofen is short-acting. That means ibuprofen lasts six to eight hours; naproxin claims to relieve pain for up to 12 hours.

"They're me too drugs," says Paone. "The trade-off is, [naproxin] takes longer to kick into the