I have osteoarthritis and find Celebrex really helps. But I am frequently told it's not good for my heart. What do you recommend?

Celebrex is a very good pain reliever for osteoarthritis. It may be important as an agent to reduce polypi in the colon, but as is often the case, the story is not all good.

Celebrex, like Vioxx, which has been withdrawn from the market, inhibits an enzyme with a long name: cyclooxygenase-2. Renamed “cox-2 inhibitors,” this group of medications blocks the inflammatory response and, consequently, the pain associated with arthritis.

Unfortunately, the endothelium, or blood vessel lining, also has metabolic processes that help dilate blood vessels, which need this enzyme action. When the enzyme gets blocked, the blood vessels are also hampered in their reactivity; an increased risk of heart attack results.

Another area of concern with Celebrex is risk of stomach bleeding. This increases some 260 percent over study controls, and if aspirin is also used, goes up to about 370 percent.

It is difficult to know what to advise someone with severe osteoarthritis, but being aware of the risks will help you be cautious with the medication.

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While this column is provided as a service to our readers, Drs. Landless and Handysides unfortunately cannot enter into personal and private communication with our readers. We recommend that you consult with your personal physician on all matters of your health.