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Opioids Don't Ease Chronic Pain More Than Other Drugs

Prescribed meds are no better than over-the-counter options, a study finds



The results are similar to less rigorous studies and bolster guidelines against routine use of opioids for chronic pain.

A yearlong study offers rigorous new evidence against using prescription opioids for chronic pain.

In patients with stubborn backaches or hip or knee arthritis, opioids worked no better than over-the-counter drugs or other nonopioids at reducing problems with walking or sleeping. And they provided slightly less pain relief.

Opioids tested included generic Vicodin, oxycodone or fentanyl patches, although few patients needed the most potent opioids. Nonopioids included generic Tylenol, ibuprofen and prescription pills for nerve or muscle pain.

The study randomly assigned patients to take opioids or other painkillers. That's the gold standard design for research.

If they don't work better than less risky drugs, there's no reason to use opioids given "their really nasty side effects — death and addiction," said lead author Erin Krebs, M.D., a physician and researcher with the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Health Care System.

The results likely will surprise many people "because opioids have this reputation as being really powerful painkillers, and that is not what we found," Krebs said.

The results echo less rigorous studies and bolster guidelines against routine use of opioids for chronic pain.

The study was published on March 7, 2018 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

About 42,000 drug-overdose deaths in the U.S. in 2016 involved opioids, including prescription painkillers, heroin, and fentanyl. Many people get hooked while taking opioids prescribed for injuries or other short-term pain and move on to cheaper, more accessible illicit drugs like heroin.

----- Written by Lindsey Tanner, Associated Press

AARP was founded in 1958 and has over 38 million members. It is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization for people over the age of 50. AARP is well-known for its advocacy efforts, providing its members with important information, products and services that enhance quality of life as they age. They also promote community service and keep members and the public informed on issues relating to the over 50 age group.

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