

Research UPDATES

Protecting Dental Patients From the Dangers of Opioids

You can manage most dental pain with pain relievers that you buy without a prescription—such as ibuprofen (Advil) and aspirin. But for severe pain, some doctors prescribe opioids such as oxycodone (OxyContin) or hydrocodone/acetaminophen (Vicodin, Lorcet).



Your dentist is part of the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network, a group of dental practices that treat patients and also

do dental research. For more information go to www.nationaldentalpbrn.org.

Dentists write about 1 out of every 10 prescriptions dispensed for the most common type of opioids (called immediate-release opioids). A study of 822 dentists found that those who prescribed opioids the *most often were the least likely* to follow safe prescribing practices.



How dentists should protect patients from opioids

Opioids can have serious side effects and risks, including abuse, addiction, and overdose. Always consider non-opioid pain management, where appropriate. When prescribing opioids, dentists should:

- Screen patients for current misuse and abuse of prescribed (and illicit) opioids
- Check the state Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), a database where health care providers can see patients' other prescriptions
- Instruct patients to store their prescription out of reach of others and to get rid of extra pills by returning them to the pharmacy or, if that's not an option, flushing them down the toilet.

How dentists treat pain

The majority of dentists in the study rarely or seldom prescribed opioids. However:

18%

prescribed opioids and recommend over-the-counter pain medicine for half or more of their patients

11%

prescribed *only* opioids for half or more of their patients



Percentage of dentists who consistently educate their patients about:

- Side effects of opioids: 50%
- Risks of misusing and sharing opioids: 27%
- How to store opioids securely: 18%
- Importance of securely disposing unused opioids: 13%

More than 40 people die every day from overdoses involving prescription opioids.

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

V) If

What patients should do

If your dentist prescribes you opioids, be sure to ask:

- Why do I need this medication? Is there something safer I could take?
- How long should I take this medication and how do I stop using it safely?
- Are you prescribing the lowest dose and the fewest number of pills that I need?
- How can I reduce the risk of potential side effects?
- What if I have a history of addiction?

Reference: McCauley JL, Leite RS, Gordan VV, Fillingim RB, Gilbert GH, Meyerowitz C, Cochran D, Rindal DB, Brady KT, National Dental PBRN Collaborative Group. Opioid prescribing and risk mitigation implementation in the management of acute pain. Results from the National Dental PBRN. Journal of the American Dental Association. In press.

Learn more about:

What to ask your doctor before taking opioids—
www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/
ConsumerUpdates/ucm529517.htm

Opioid abuse and addiction medlineplus.gov/ opioidabuseandaddiction.html

Opioids for dental patients www.mouthhealthy.org/en/aztopics/o/opioids

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To ensure excellent dental care, the Network carries out its studies in real-world settings—like your dentist's office—with regular patients like yourself who volunteer to participate. The studies wouldn't be possible without the involvement of our wonderful patients.

Thanks to everyone who participated in this and all of our studies!