

Newsletter article that you can put into your patient newsletters, or printed out as a handout:

Too High a Price

Why, months before our “Drug-Free Pain Management Awareness” campaign in September, are we choosing to bring up the opioid epidemic? To answer this question, we point to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) release about the toll it took in 2016, when more people died from drug overdoses in a single year than in the Vietnam and Iraq wars combined.

It is no surprise that the CDC says synthetic and classic opioids today account for six of every 10 drug overdose deaths, given that another CDC study found that one out of every four Americans prescribed long-term opioid painkillers struggle with addiction. It’s a national tragedy that deserves our continuous attention.

As doctors of chiropractic join with other healthcare providers to explore the intricacies of chronic pain and the combination of treatment options, beginning with drug-free, non-invasive chiropractic care, a myriad of pain-related issues continue to surface. Deserving careful consideration are the risks of over-the-counter pain relievers such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and acetaminophen.

- Managing the pain with NSAIDs and acetaminophen is like constantly replacing the tires on your car instead of getting the alignment that’s causing them to wear out in the first place. It is far better managed through the first-line option of spinal manipulation—eight out of 10 who seek chiropractic care for pain say they experience significant relief—and, if needed, subsequent physical therapies and medical procedures to address the cause of the pain. Yet 70 percent of new neck and back pain sufferers say they relied on NSAIDs such as Advil, aspirin and Aleve and 45 percent took acetaminophens, such as Tylenol in the first year, according to the 2017 Gallup-Palmer College of Chiropractic annual report.
- A U.S. experiment recently reported in Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) found that NSAIDs and acetaminophen are better at easing the intensity of chronic pain in the back, knees and hips than prescribed opioid painkillers, but they still come with risks. While NSAIDs are not addictive, they can cause internal bleeding and kidney damage. There is also a well-established link between their use and heart hazards, according to Harvard Health Publications. Acetaminophen is generally considered safer, said the Mayo Clinic, but taking more than the recommended dose or mixing it with alcohol increases the risk of kidney damage or liver failure. These risks increase with age and additional health issues.
- If you must take NSAIDs or acetaminophen, take the lowest recommended dose and only increase it if necessary for pain, recommended Harvard Health Publications. Make sure you’re monitored for possible side effects, and stop taking them when your pain subsides to the point where you can find comfort with hot baths or cold packs. Remember, too, that you have options in treating your pain. Stay as active as possible and watch what you eat. Talk to your team of health providers, including your doctor of chiropractic, about what treatments are available.

If there is one common thread in all of this, it's that we're paying too high a price for the hope of stopping the pain. Maybe by raising consciousness now and during our "Drug-Free Pain Management Awareness" campaign in September, we can make a difference.