

Children suffer unnecessarily from chronic postoperative pain

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Are children suffering needlessly after surgery? UC Irvine anesthesiologists who specialize in pediatric care believe so.

An operation can be one of the most [traumatic events](#) children face, and according to a UCI study, many of them experience unnecessary postsurgical pain lasting weeks or months.

Such [chronic pain](#) is well understood and treated in [adults](#) but has been generally overlooked in [pediatric patients](#), said Dr. Zeev Kain, professor and chair of anesthesiology & perioperative care.

This month, he and his UCI colleagues published in the *Journal of Pediatric Surgery* the first-ever study of chronic postoperative pain in children. Out of 113 youngsters who had procedures ranging from appendectomies to orthopedic surgery, 13 percent reported pain that lingered for months.

While the sample group was small, Kain said, the study's implications are profound. Four million children undergo surgical procedures in the U.S. each year, suggesting that more than half a million of them suffer well after leaving the hospital. This results in more school absences and visits to the doctor and, for parents, days off work.

Kain said the research indicates that physicians need to more effectively manage pain within 48 hours of surgery – which, in adults, has been shown to minimize the potential for chronic pain – and that parents

should be properly prepared to alleviate their child's pain at home.

"Medical professionals must understand this issue better and learn how to work with parents to care for chronic pain," he said. "We hope this study marks a first step toward long-term, definitive solutions."

UCI pediatric pain psychologist Michelle Fortier led the study – which involved patients from CHOC Children's Hospital in Orange, Calif. – and Drs. Jody Chou and Eva Mauer also participated.

Provided by University of California - Irvine

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