

Alzheimer's patients' use of painkilling patches cause for concern

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(HealthDay)—Long-term use of powerful opioid painkillers may be

common among Alzheimer's disease patients and could be a cause for concern, researchers report.

Researchers analyzed data from more than 67,000 Alzheimer's disease patients in Finland. They found that 7 percent had used opioids for more than six months for non-cancer pain relief.

One-third of patients who began using opioids became long-term users, and researchers found a strong link between opioid skin patches and long-term use.

While rates of long-term opioid use was about the same as in the general population, long-term use of skin patches was twice as common among Alzheimer's [patients](#), the study showed. People in the [general population](#) more often took pills.

The University of Eastern Finland researchers also found that long-term opioid use together with benzodiazepines was common. They said the finding is cause for concern because both medicines cause drowsiness.

Benzodiazepines are used to relieve anxiety, relax muscles and prevent seizures; they include Valium and Xanax.

The researchers, led by Aleksi Hamina, a [doctoral student](#) in the university's School of Pharmacy, stressed that long-term opioid use is problematic when dealing with non-cancer pain. Evidence of its benefits is limited, and the risk of adverse effects is increased compared to short-term treatments, they said in a university news release.

Changing doses and discontinuing use of opioid patches requires more careful monitoring, so use of these [patches](#) should be assessed regularly in people with dementia, the [researchers](#) said.

The study was published online recently in the journal *Pain*.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more on [opioids](#).

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