

Millennials prefer healthy habits, less likely to choose opioids to manage pain

August 30 2017

Often spending their days hunched over phones, tablets or computers and their free time at spin class or playing sports, millennials are the next generation poised to experience chronic pain. Even at their young age, millennials say acute and chronic pain are already interfering with their quality of life.

Their preferred method to manage [pain](#)? Lifestyle changes such as exercising, eating right, quitting smoking and losing weight, according to a nationwide survey commissioned by the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) in conjunction with September's Pain Awareness Month. (Click here to download infographic.)

The survey also found millennials were half as likely as [baby boomers](#) to have turned to opioids to manage pain, and 1 in 5 millennials regret that they used the highly addictive painkillers.

But while the results reflect a positive trend, they also reveal a knowledge gap. The survey found many millennials were:

- More likely to obtain opioids inappropriately. One in 10 millennials obtained opioids through another household member's prescription, compared to 3 percent of Gen Xers, 1 percent of baby boomers and none of the silent generation.
- More likely to think it's OK to take an [opioid](#) without a prescription. Nearly 30 percent of millennials thought it was OK to take an opioid without a prescription, compared to 20 percent

of Gen Xers, 12 percent of baby boomers and 3 percent of the silent generation.

- AND less likely to dispose of leftover opioids safely. In fact, 1 in 5 millennials said they "did not know" the best way to safely dispose of opioids, and only 37 percent were aware that a collection center at a local police station, hospital pharmacy or drug store was the best method of disposal.

"It's encouraging that millennials see the value of opting for safer and often more effective methods of managing pain," said ASA President Jeffrey Plagenhoef, M.D. "But clearly they are in need of further education when it comes to opioids and [chronic pain](#) because using the drugs initially to treat pain can turn into a lifelong struggle with addiction."

Learning how to manage pain safely and effectively is vital: 75 percent of millennials say they have had [acute pain](#) (which comes on suddenly and lasts less than three months) and nearly 60 percent have experienced chronic pain (which lasts longer than three months). The source of that pain is reflective of millennials' lifestyle, including technology use (leading to eye strain, neck aches, hand or finger pain, wrist or arm pain), migraines and sports injuries.

According to the survey, millennials (ages 18-36) and members of Generation X (ages 37-52) are most likely to report pain interfered with their work responsibilities, parenting abilities and participation in family activities.

It's important to address pain before it interferes with quality of life by seeing the right specialist for pain management. Whatever the age, people in severe pain who don't find relief through lifestyle changes should see a physician who specializes in pain management, such as a physician anesthesiologist. These specialists have received four years of

medical school and additional training in a medical specialty, followed by an additional year of training to become an expert in treating pain. They have the expertise to best help you manage your pain.

But engaging in lifestyle changes before chronic pain can gain a further foothold is preferable. When possible, prevention is best. "Chronic pain does not have to be an automatic response to aging," said Dr. Plagenhoef. "Healthy lifestyle changes such as exercising, proper nutrition and maintaining a healthy weight can keep millennials from dealing with some of the chronic pain their parents and grandparents are experiencing."

To help all generations effectively manage their pain, ASA offers the following tips:

- Take a break from devices and gaming: Aches from smartphone, tablet, gaming and other digital device overuse is common. To avoid it, use devices at eye level instead of looking down for long periods of time, which puts strain on your neck and back. Use the talk to text feature to limit finger and wrist strain. Sit up straight while gaming and get off the couch and stretch occasionally. To avoid digital eye strain, look away from the screen every 20 seconds and position yourself so there is an appropriate distance between your eyes and the screen.
- Don't be a weekend warrior. Whether you plan to hit the basketball court after many years away or do CrossFit weekly, ease into it. Warm up your muscles and stretch to avoid pain and injury. If you think you've been injured after exercise or playing sports see a [pain management](#) specialist right away to evaluate the pain.
- Remember to move. Whether you're in the library studying or at a desk job, get up and move at least once an hour, if not more. Sitting and being sedentary can lead to aches and pains,

especially lower back pain. Stretch your legs and back by standing and walking on a regular basis rather than sitting for long periods of time.

- Get healthy. Take charge of your health now and engage in healthy [lifestyle changes](#) before chronic pain sets in. Participate in low-impact aerobic and strength training exercises regularly. Maintain a healthy weight and eat a balanced diet. Don't smoke, or if you do, talk to a physician about programs available to help you quit.
- Take and dispose of opioids the right way. If a physician prescribes opioids, ask many questions about taking them appropriately. Don't continue taking opioids when your pain subsides. If you have leftover opioids, dispose of them at a collection center at a local police station, hospital pharmacy, or drugstore. This will ensure others who have not been prescribed the opioids do not have access to them.

The 10-question ORC International CARAVAN Omnibus Survey was conducted online August 7-9, 2017 among 1,011 U.S. adults 18 years or older: 34 percent were [millennials](#), 25 percent were Gen Xers, 35 percent were baby boomers (ages 53-71) and 6 percent were from the silent generation (ages 72-92). The demographically representative sample included 504 men and 507 women.

Provided by American Society of Anesthesiologists

Citation: Millennials prefer healthy habits, less likely to choose opioids to manage pain (2017, August 30) retrieved 5 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-08-millennials-healthy-habits-opioids-pain.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.