

Reducing opioids in tandem with education could lower addiction rates among post-operative patients

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Researchers at Emory University School of Medicine have found that giving patients fewer opioid tablets after surgery and educating them

about baseline pain relief options may help lower the chances of patients developing post-operative narcotic addiction.

The results, based on surveying [patients](#) at one [medical center](#) who were undergoing ACL reconstruction surgery, were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* on June 25.

Emory chief of sports medicine and professor of orthopaedics John Xerogeanes, MD, was one of the authors of the paper. He believes there is a significant psychological component to the findings. "It appears that explaining to patients before the surgery that they should take narcotic [pain](#) medicine only if their pain is intolerable makes a difference. Then after the procedure, when you recommend they take fewer narcotics, they do."

The average age of patients in the study was around 20 years, which Xerogeanes says is meaningful. "Minimizing the exposure of adolescents and youth to opiates and left-over [pain medication](#) after surgery is a step in the right direction given the current opioid epidemic."

Xerogeanes says a key takeaway of the study is to cut the opioid dose for post-operative patients in half; a practice that he says is already underway. "We used to give 50 opiate tablets after [surgery](#). Now we only give 20."

Another next step is to work with alternative non-narcotic medications during post-operative care. "It will be valuable to see if that can help us further," says Xerogeanes.

More information: Kevin X. Farley et al. Association Between Quantity of Opioids Prescribed After Surgery or Preoperative Opioid Use Education With Opioid Consumption, *JAMA* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2019.6125](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2019.6125)

Provided by Emory University

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