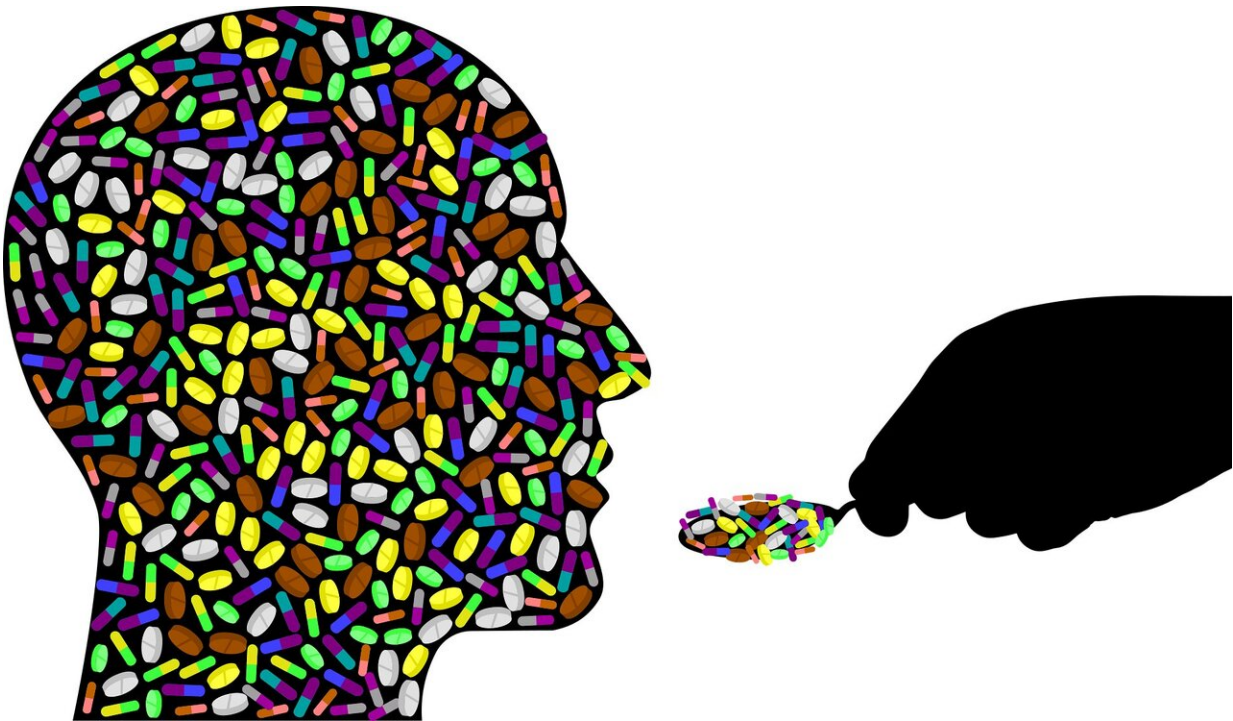


# Prescription opioid use linked to mood disorders

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People who are prescribed opioids for pain relief have a higher risk of developing mood disorders such as anxiety, University of Queensland researchers have found.

The study, led by Dr. Janni Leung from UQ's National Centre for Youth

Substance Use Research, systematically reviewed the effects of prescribed opioids on mental health.

"There has been a lot of research around addiction to opioids—commonly used in [cancer treatment](#) or acute [pain](#)—but there is limited understanding about how they affect the development of mood disorders," Dr. Leung said.

"Our research reviewed studies of patients who were prescribed opioids to treat painful physical health conditions, including burns and trauma surgery.

"We compared these samples with individuals who were not using opioids or were prescribed lower dosages, and the results showed that higher doses of prescription opioids might increase the risk of developing depressive, bipolar and [anxiety disorders](#), particularly with prolonged use."

Dr. Leung said the relationship between [chronic pain](#) and mental health is complex, as each condition contributes to the other.

"Over the past two decades the prescription of opioids for [pain management](#) has increased," Dr. Leung said.

"Research into the influence of opioids on mental health is still in the early stages, and further research is needed to find out how the medication affects different mood disorders."

The paper's co-author Dr. Daniel Stjepanovic from UQ's National Centre for Youth Substance Use Research said it was important to understand all risks before prescribing the medication to a patient.

"The effects on mental health should be taken into account when

prescribing opioids, especially in individuals who are at risk of mood disorders such as anxiety or depression," Dr. Stjepanovic said.

"It's incredibly important to understand the role opioids play in the development of these mood disorders to ensure people are receiving the care and treatment they require, without putting them at high risk."

The full research paper is available in *Pain Medicine*.

**More information:** Janni Leung et al, Mood and anxiety symptoms in persons taking prescription opioids: a systematic review with meta-analyses of longitudinal studies, *Pain Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/pm/pnac029](https://doi.org/10.1093/pm/pnac029)

Provided by University of Queensland

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