

'Drug take back day' is Saturday: Check for leftover opioids in your home

April 26 2024, by Ernie Mundell



Each year, thousands of Americans head home after a surgery clutching

prescription opioids to help ease post-surgical pain.

Trouble is, most won't use all those pills, and that could lead to a lot of misuse and addiction, one study found.

And with [National Prescription Drug Take Back Day](#) slated for Saturday, it's time yet again to raise awareness, one expert said.

"While the larger battle against [opioid misuse](#) rages on, let's not overlook the simple steps that can be taken post-surgery to prevent these powerful drugs from becoming a public health hazard by employing safer storage strategies," said study co-author Dr. Asif Ilyas.

"It's time to ensure that the aftermath of surgical recovery doesn't inadvertently fuel the crisis we're trying so desperately to quell," said Ilyas, who is president of the Rothman Orthopaedic Institute Foundation for Opioid Research & Education. The foundation is dedicated to finding solutions to the epidemic of opioid abuse.

In the [study](#), Ilyas and his colleagues surveyed 469 adults who'd been discharged with a prescription opioid following an [orthopedic surgery](#).

The results suggest there are a lot of unused, highly addictive opioids lying around in American homes.

"Nearly every statistic from this study is a call to action," Ilyas said in a foundation news release.

"A staggering 94% of patients had leftover opioids post-surgery," he noted. "While some might see this as a testament to the effectiveness of modern pain-management techniques, it also underlines a massive surplus of potent drugs ripe for potential misuse or diversion."

More than two-thirds (68%) of patients said they had disposed of these excess opioids, but their means of doing so varied greatly. Pharmacies were the preferred locale to dispose of unwanted opioids, the survey found.

"But it's not just about disposal," added Ilyas, who is also a professor of orthopaedic surgery at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

"Alarming, 86% of patients stored their opioids in unlocked locations," he noted. "This casual storage approach can turn homes into inadvertent hubs for drug diversion, especially given that these powerful medications are often kept in easily accessible places like bathrooms and kitchens. This statistic should be particularly unsettling for anyone with teenagers or frequent guests."

On Saturday's [National Prescription Drug Take Back Day](#), the Drug Enforcement Agency works with [police departments](#), hospitals and other safe disposal sites to rid homes of dangerous drugs.

But having events like these "one or two days a year isn't enough," Ilyas stressed. "The conversation must be ongoing, emphasizing the dangers of misuse and the importance of secure storage and proper disposal."

Patients may also need even more robust counseling on the use and dangers of misuse of any opioids they bring home, he added.

More information: Find out more about the safe use of opioid painkillers at [Medicare.gov](#).

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