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Avoid Addictive Opioids. Choose Physical Therapy for Safe Pain Management

No one wants to live in pain. But no one should put their health at risk in an effort to be pain free. Advanced Therapy & Sports Medicine, in Great Bend is here to help you address your pain.

Since 1999, Americans have increasingly been prescribed opioids—painkillers like Vicodin, OxyContin, Opana, and methodone, and combination drugs like Percocet.

In some situations, dosed appropriately, prescription opioids are an appropriate part of medical treatment. However, opioid risks include depression, overdose, and addiction, plus withdrawal symptoms when stopping use.

And people addicted to prescription opioids are 40 times more likely to become addicted to heroin.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is urging health care providers to reduce the use of opioids in favor of safe alternatives like physical therapy.

Don't just mask the pain. Treat it. This should be your goal!

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), sales of prescription opioids have quadrupled in the United States, even though "there has not been an overall change in the amount of pain that Americans report."

In response to a growing opioid epidemic, the CDC released opioid prescription guidelines in March 2016. The guidelines recognize that prescription opioids are appropriate in certain cases, including cancer treatment, palliative care, and end-of-life care, and also in certain acute care situations, if properly dosed.

But for other pain



management, the CDC recommends nonopioid approaches including physical therapy.

Patients should choose physical therapy when ...

• **The risks of opioid use outweigh the rewards.**

Potential side effects of opioids include depression, overdose, and addiction, plus withdrawal symptoms when stopping opioid use. Because of these risks, "experts agreed that opioids should not be considered firstline or routine therapy for chronic pain," the CDC guidelines state. Even in cases when evidence on the long-term benefits of non-opioid therapies is limited, "risks are much lower" with non-opioid treatment plans.

• **Patients want to do more than mask the pain.**

Opioids reduce the sensation of pain by interrupting pain signals to the brain. Physical therapists treat pain through movement while partnering with patients to improve or maintain their mobility and quality of life.

• **Pain or function problems are related to low back pain, hip or knee osteoarthritis, or fibromyalgia.**

The CDC cites "high-quality evidence" supporting exercise as part of a physical therapy treatment plan for those familiar conditions.

• **Opioids are prescribed for pain.**

Even in situations when opioids are prescribed, the CDC recommends that patients should receive "the lowest effective dosage," and opioids "should be combined" with nonopioid therapies, such as physical therapy.

• **Pain lasts 90 days.**

At this point, the pain is considered "chronic," and the risks for continued opioid use increase. An estimated 116 million Americans have chronic pain each year. The CDC guidelines note that nonopioid therapies are "preferred" for chronic pain and that "clinicians should consider opioid therapy only if expected benefits for both pain and function are anticipated to outweigh risks to the patient."

Before you agree to a prescription for opioids, consult with a physical therapist to discuss options for nonopioid treatment.

"Given the substantial evidence gaps on opioids, uncertain benefits of long-term use and potential for serious harm, patient education and discussion before starting opioid therapy are critical so that patient preferences and values can be understood and used to inform clinical decisions," the CDC states.

The Physical Therapists @ Advanced Therapy & Sports Medicine can play a valuable role in the patient education process, including setting realistic expectations for recovery with or without opioids. Information derived from moveforwardpt.com

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