

# Addicted seniors a serious problem: Opioid use among the older population



## Opioid abuse is a problem for all age groups, including seniors.

The public is quickly learning that drug abuse goes beyond the illegal substances that are purchased on the street. Abuse of drugs extends to the prescription medications sitting in many medicine cabinets.

While teenagers and young adults may be the first to be stereotyped as prescription drug abusers, seniors may have unwittingly become mixed up in one of the most misused prescription classes: opioid pain relievers.

The problem of opioid abuse has been a growing issue for years. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates 2.1 million people in the United States suffer from substance abuse of opioid pain relievers. Older patients are increasingly

and repeatedly prescribed opioids to address chronic pain from arthritis, cancer and other problems that become more apparent as people age.

Data from U.S. Medicare recipients found that, in 2011, roughly 15 percent of seniors were prescribed an opioid after being discharged from the hospital. When followed up on three months later, 42 percent were still taking the medication. Fast forward to 2015, and almost one-third of all Medicare patients were prescribed opioid painkillers by their physicians, says AARP. The Canadian Institute for Health Information says adults between the ages of 45 and 64 and seniors age 65 and older had the highest rates of hospital-

izations due to opioid poisoning over the past 10 years.

AARP also indicates nearly three million Americans age 50 or older have started to take painkillers for reasons beyond what their doctors prescribed. Experts from the Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing warn that dependence on opioids can set in after just a few days. Discomfort and side effects can occur when the pills are stopped. Opioids can decrease pain at first, but many people find they can be less effective over time. As a result, patients need to take greater amounts. Although many people can take opioids in small doses for short periods of time without problems, many find themselves overcome by a troubling addiction. Some doctors prefer not to use opioids as a first line of treatment for chronic pain.

Another possible risk of opioids among

seniors is that the medication can cause disorientation that may lead to falls and fractures. The senior care resource A Place for Mom also says that prescription narcotics may increase risk of respiratory arrest. What's more, an older body may not absorb and filter medicines as effectively as younger bodies can. This means that older adults might become addicted to or have side effects from a prescription drug at a lower dose.

Seniors concerned about opioids can discuss other options with their doctors, such as nonopioid medications and alternative therapies for pain management, like massage or acupuncture. If opioids are prescribed, ask for the lowest dose and don't exceed the time frame for taking the medicine. Only take the pills when absolutely necessary, and never mix opioids with alcohol or other substances.

## Discounts available to the over 50 crowd

Many people may not look forward to the day they turn 50, but cracking the half century mark can have its perks. Many retailers and businesses offer discounts to men and women over 50, and the following are just a few ways that people who have turned the big 5-0 might be able to save some money.

- **Movie tickets:** The cost of going to the movies has skyrocketed in recent years, as today's theaters now offer an array of amenities and, thanks to bigger screens and better technology, a better viewing experience than the theaters the over-50 crowd grew up visiting. While film lovers may need to wait until they turn 60 to cash in on discount movie tickets, many chain movie theaters offer discounted tickets to older patrons.

- **Travel:** Men and women over 50 may be able to save substantial amounts of money on travel simply by typing in their birthdays when purchasing tickets or planning trips. For example, men and women over the age of 62 are eligible to receive a 15 percent discount on the lowest available rail fare on most Amtrak trains.

- **Ancestry:** As men and women age, many begin to develop a greater interest in their heritage. Those who join AARP (membership is available to men and women who are 50 or older) can receive a 30 percent discount on an Ancestry World Explorer membership in the first year they're members.

- **Auto rentals:** AARP members also are eligible to save up to 30 percent on base rates for vehicle rentals at Avis. The discounts are applicable at participating locations in both the United States and Canada.

- **Hotels:** Men and women over 50 may have extra time on their hands once their kids go off to college and then begin careers and families of their own. Many such adults use that extra free time to travel, which requires staying in hotels. Many hotels offer discounted rates to travelers over the age of 50, and such discounts may make it more affordable to book directly through hotel websites instead of using popular travel sites where rates tend to fluctuate by the minute.

- **Dining:** Of course, many restaurants offer early bird specials for patrons who want to eat a little bit earlier than guests typically arrive for dinner. However, many chain restaurants also offer discounts to senior diners regardless of when they arrive. Such discounts are sometimes even applicable to both food and beverages.

- **Mobile phone services:** Men and women over 50 may not have grown up with smartphones in their hands, but chances are they now cannot imagine life without them. Some mobile providers offer discounts to AARP members, while others may offer senior discounts to customers whether they're AARP members or not.

I don't feel old.  
I don't feel anything until noon.  
Then it's time for my nap.  
- Bob Hope

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