



Prescription medication and death due to overdose among people with spinal cord injury

What did we study?

We studied deaths among people with SCI due to prescription overdose. This is an important topic because of the opioid epidemic across the USA. According to the CDC, in 2017, prescription opioid overdose were involved in more than 35% of all opioid overdose deaths.

What did we find?

We found that out of 690 deaths in our study, 24 of these deaths (3.5%) were at least partially related to prescription medication overdose. Under half of these were related to opioids. The study was not large enough to compare with the general population.

Who is at risk?

People who are at highest risk to death due to overdose are those who take medicine every day for pain, sleep, spasticity, or mood. The more types of medications and the more often they are taken, the greater the risk. Other risk factors are heavy drinking (having 5+ drinks on occasion) and personality where people like taking risks or are impulsive (doing things without a lot of thought). These deaths often may be prevented.

What can I do?

If you take a lot of medication to treat things like pain, sleep, spasms, and mood, talk to your healthcare provider to make sure the medications that you are taking have limited side effects. It is always good to see what your choices are for other treatments (not medicine). If you are a moderate to heavy drinker or someone who likes to take chances, you are at greater risk of dying from an unintentional prescription overdose. Having many drinks in a short timeframe may lead to poor decision-making. Some medications may also reduce judgment. So, taking them together is very risky. Be honest with your healthcare provider regarding alcohol use or other activities so that they are best able to help you find the safest solutions to treat your pain and other conditions.

Disclaimer

This research alert is based on our research. No study is definitive, so there may be other studies with somewhat different findings. We provide this information for the sole purpose of helping people with SCI to make the most informed decisions. We always recommend that you bring up any concerns with a healthcare provider, especially when talking about prescription drugs.

Reference

Krause, J. S., Cao, Y., DiPiro, N., & Cuddy, E. (2018). Personality, high-risk behaviors, and elevated risk of unintentional deaths related to drug poisoning among individuals with spinal cord injury. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 99(10), 1941-1948.

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