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# Addiction Risk of Pain Management Drugs

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Drugs used for pain management, also known as **analgesics**, are medications used to **relieve pain**.
- There are several different types of pain drugs, which can be categorized into three main classes: (1) **non-opioid analgesics**, (2) **opioid analgesics**, and (3) **adjuvant medications**.
- Pain drugs, especially opioids, can carry a **risk of addiction** when not used as prescribed or when used for extended periods.
- The **risk of addiction** depends on **various factors**, including the type of medication, the dose, the duration of use, an individual's personal history of substance abuse, and genetics.

Here's a closer look at the addiction risk associated with different types of pain drugs:

### 1. NON-OPIOID ANALGESICS:

- **Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs):** These drugs reduce pain and inflammation. Common NSAIDs include ibuprofen (**Advil, Motrin**), naproxen (**Aleve**), and aspirin.
- **Acetaminophen:** It is not an NSAID but is often used to relieve pain and reduce fever. Brand name examples include Tylenol.

Non-opioid pain medications are generally not associated with the same addiction potential as opioids.

*“NON-OPIOID” ADDICTION RISK.....LOW (when used as directed)*

2. OPIOID ANALGESICS (NARCOTICS):

- Opioids are **powerful pain relievers** that work by **binding to specific receptors in the brain and spinal cord**.
- They are typically reserved for **severe pain** or pain that does not respond well to other medications.
- Common opioid drugs include **morphine**, oxycodone (**OxyContin, Percocet**), hydrocodone (**Vicodin**), and **fentanyl**.
- The risk of addiction is **more significant with strong opioids** like fentanyl, oxycodone, and hydromorphone compared to weaker opioids like codeine.
- Using opioids for **non-medical purposes**, taking higher doses than prescribed, or using them for euphoric effects can lead to addiction.

*“OPIOID” ADDICTION RISK.....HIGH*

3. ADJUVANT MEDICATIONS:

- These are drugs that are not primarily designed for pain relief but can **be used to enhance** the effects of other analgesics or manage specific types of pain. They include:
- **Antidepressants:** Certain antidepressant medications, such as tricyclic antidepressants and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), can help with neuropathic pain.
- **Anticonvulsants:** Medications like gabapentin and pregabalin are often used for neuropathic pain.
- **Muscle Relaxants:** These drugs are used to alleviate muscle-related pain and spasms.

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- **Topical Analgesics:** Creams, gels, or patches that are applied to the skin, containing substances like lidocaine or capsaicin to relieve localized pain.
- **Corticosteroids:** These may be used to reduce inflammation and pain, especially in cases of joint or soft tissue pain.
- Adjuvant medications are typically not considered addictive. However, some individuals may **experience dependence** on or withdrawal symptoms.

*“ADJUVANT” ADDICTION RISK.....MODERATE*

It's important to note that the **choice of pain medication** depends on:

- (1) the type and severity of pain
- (2) the patient's overall health
- (3) the potential for side effects or interactions with other medications

- Pain management should always be under the **guidance of a healthcare professional** to ensure the safe and effective use of these drugs.
- Additionally, there is **ongoing research and development** in the field of pain management, so new medications and treatments may become available in the future.
- It's essential to use all pain medications **as prescribed** by a healthcare professional.
- To **minimize the risk of addiction** and other potential adverse effects, here are some general recommendations:

- (1) **Follow the Prescribed Dosage:** Take the medication exactly as directed by your healthcare provider. Do not exceed the recommended dose or frequency.
- (2) **Short-Term Use:** Opioids should be prescribed for the shortest duration and lowest effective dose to manage pain. They are generally not intended for long-term use.
- (3) **Close Monitoring:** Regularly communicate with your healthcare provider to evaluate your pain management plan. Adjustments may be necessary over time.

- (4) **Dispose of Unused Medications:** Safely dispose of any unused pain medications to prevent misuse by others.
- (5) **Inform Your Healthcare Provider:** Disclose any history of substance abuse or addiction to your healthcare provider, as it can help them make more informed decisions about your pain management.
- (6) **Seek Alternatives:** Explore non-pharmacological pain management strategies and non-opioid options when appropriate.
- (7) **Report Side Effects:** Notify your healthcare provider if you experience any concerning side effects or signs of dependence, such as cravings, withdrawal symptoms, or tolerance.

It's important to be aware of the **potential risks** and benefits associated with **pain medications** and to work closely with your healthcare provider to strike a balance between effective pain management and minimizing addiction risk.

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