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Lifespan Lyme Disease Center

RECONSIDERING OPIOIDS FOR CHRONIC PAIN MANAGEMENT

Many Lyme patients deal with chronic pain. Chronic pain management is a national priority currently undergoing a revolution. Healthcare providers are rethinking the costs and benefits of prescribing opioids for chronic pain management due to their addictive nature and severe side effects. There is also a lack of evidence for opioid effectiveness in long term pain management.

America is the number one prescriber in the world of prescription opioid medications which include oxycodone (Oxycontin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine, methadone, and fentanyl. Overprescribing highly addictive opioids has led to a major addiction problem in the US. Several studies have linked teenage drug addiction to opioids prescribed for sports injuries. *Sports Illustrated* wrote an article in June 2015 about this issue: <https://www.si.com/more-sports/2015/06/18/special-report-painkillers-young-athletes-heroin-addicts>.

In fact, many opioid addictions begin with a prescription. Here are some shocking statistics from the CDC.

- More than 3 out of 5 drug overdose deaths involve an opioid.
- Since 1999, the amount of prescription opioids sold in the US nearly quadrupled, yet there hasn't been an overall change in the amount of pain that Americans report.
- Overdoses involving opioids killed more than 28,000 people in 2014.
- Over half of those deaths were from prescription opioids.
- 78 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.
- As many as 1 in 4 patients receiving long-term opioid therapy in a primary care setting struggles with opioid addiction.

If you are taking Opioids, you should be aware of the following:

- Avoid taking benzodiazepines such as (Xanax), diazepam (Valium), and lorazepam (Ativan) while also taking an opioid. This combination can lead to an overdose.
- Taking opioids can lead to tolerance (you need more of the drug just to feel the same effects), dependence (physical withdrawal symptoms may occur if the medication is stopped), and increased sensitivity to pain which can exacerbate the need for more pain management.
- Opioids suppress the immune system. This is precisely the opposite of the goal during treatment for Lyme disease. Chronic immune system suppression through opioid use can be detrimental in the long run.

- An overdose of prescription opioids can make you stop breathing, leading to death. Be sure to take your prescription exactly as prescribed.
- Fentanyl is sold legally and illegally. Illegal fentanyl is often mixed with heroin or cocaine without the user's knowledge.
- Mild withdrawal symptoms can occur even at the end of a prescribed dose of opioids. Symptoms can include: nausea, muscle cramping, anxiety, and diarrhea. Call your doctor if you experience these symptoms.

Alternative Options for Chronic Pain Management:

- Acupuncture may relieve pain using thin needles inserted at particular acupuncture points around the body.
- Dehydration can aggravate chronic pain symptoms, so be sure to stay hydrated.
- Massage helps ease tension in muscles and increases blood flow to damaged areas.
- Yoga stretches muscles and increases blood flow. Yoga can also be very meditative and can improve the psychological symptoms associated with chronic pain.
- Extra strength Tylenol and Ibuprofen are often underestimated. These drugs can be used in combination with each other and even with prescription pain medications. Talk to your doctor about the dose that is right for you.
- Creams and/or gels for pain can be applied topically for pain relief. They can be over the counter or prescription such as diclofenac (Voltarin).
- Physical Therapy can help strengthen the muscles and tendons in areas that provide increased stability to the area and reduce pain.
- Anti-seizure medications can help fibromyalgia, neuropathic pain, and migraines.
- Pain shots, including trigger point injections for tight spots on muscles, nerve root blocks, and epidural injections, can ease intense chronic pain.
- Radiofrequency ablation involves a heated needle placed next to a nerve to stop the pain signal from being sent. It helps arthritis and neuropathy.
- Transcutaneous Electro-Nerve Stimulator (TENS) units use pads that are placed on your skin to provide stimulation around the area of pain.
- Tricyclic antidepressants can help pain management.
- Cognitive behavior therapy can help deal with the psychological aspects of chronic pain management.

There are many other options for long-term pain management. Speak with your doctor to find the treatment option that works best for you.

Works Cited

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