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Young adults seek opioid alternatives for pain relief after wisdom teeth extraction

Summer vacation is the time of year students of every age look forward to. Warm weather, no school or homework, and summer travels — there are plenty of reasons to enjoy the break from the classroom. However, it's not all fun and games, especially for college students. Summer break is also the busiest time of year for wisdom teeth extractions, and if complications arise, the procedure could be problematic long past summer's end.

A common prescription

Those who have had their wisdom teeth extracted can attest that the pain associated with the procedure can be excruciating and long-lasting. Because of this, many dentists and oral surgeons also prescribe opioids to patients to help them manage their pain. In fact, a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* finds that dentists are among the leading prescribers of opioids. The research also finds that these medicines are most commonly prescribed for surgical tooth extraction for patients between the ages of 14 and 24.



Finding a better alternative

While opioids remain the popular course of pain relief in instances of wisdom tooth extraction, more and more oral surgery patients — and/or their parents — are becoming interested in non-opioid alternatives. The addictive properties of opioids are part of this concern, but increasingly there is also consideration being paid to their other side effects.

New research from Nielsen's Harris Poll Online, sponsored by Pacira Pharmaceuticals, Inc., finds that 90 percent of survey respondents said they experienced adverse side effects after taking opioids. These side effects included nausea, vomiting, confusion or feeling "spaced out," all of which impaired their daily activities. Respondents also reported being unable to drive, go to school, work or participate in sports for several days.

These experiences associated with opioids, in addition to potential addiction concerns, are motivating many to seek alternatives for pain relief after wisdom tooth extraction. The same study found 70 percent of oral surgery patients would choose a non-opioid medication for pain if they were given the choice. Eighty percent said they would be interested in an alternative even if it resulted in a higher expense.

However, despite the clear demand from patients, the industry appears slow to move forward. Seventy percent of respondents reported that they were prescribed an opioid after having their wisdom teeth out.

Realigning on care options

“It’s evident that opioids continue to be the cornerstone of pain management following third molar extraction, despite their association with unwanted side effects and the risk for abuse or addiction,” says Dr. Pedro Franco, Immediate Past President of the American College of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. “This research shows us that an overwhelming majority of patients — many of whom are likely exposed to opioids for the first time following an oral surgery procedure — would prefer a non-opioid option. I am hopeful that these findings will encourage clinicians and patients alike to be more proactive in their pain management discussions, especially as it relates to the availability of opioid alternatives.”

While patients — or their parents — may not be used to discussing such things with their health care providers, it’s an opportunity they can’t pass up. Discussing pain management options — including non-opioid options and long-acting local anesthetics — with your oral surgeon remains the most effective way to feel comfortable about your wisdom teeth treatment, both at the moment of the procedure and all along the path to recovery.

For a list of questions you can ask your oral surgeon prior to surgery, visit www.oralsurgeryprep.com.

<http://www.latimes.com/bp/la-ara-30954-young-adults-seek-opioid-alternatives-for-pain-relief-after-wisdom-teeth-extraction-20170530-adstory.html>