

# What you can do to help fight the opioid epidemic

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(HealthDay)—Proper disposal of prescription painkillers and use of safe alternatives to manage pain could help combat America's opioid abuse epidemic, doctors say.

"Today, we are in the midst of an opioid crisis," said Dr. David Ring, chairman of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons' (AAOS) Committee on Patient Safety.

In 2015, about 12.5 million Americans misused [prescription opioids](#) (such as OxyContin and Vicodin) and more than 15,000 overdose deaths were attributed to the drugs, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"Orthopaedic surgeons, along with other physicians and [health care professionals](#), are working diligently and collectively to reduce the strength and number of opioid pills prescribed for patients, and to change the patient-doctor conversation regarding pain: how pain can be safely managed with non-opioid medications,

therapies and coping strategies; and the potential danger for [opioid misuse](#)," Ring said in an AAOS news release.

As part of Pain Awareness Month in September, the AAOS offers the following advice on [pain management](#) and proper disposal of unused opioid medications:

- **Expect some pain after surgery or an injury.** Pain is a normal part of healing and will improve day-by-day. Studies show that patients who prepare for pain are less uncomfortable and have a better feeling that recovery is on track.
- **Follow orders.** Create a pain relief plan with your doctor and stick to it. It may include a mix of opioid-based medications and over-the-counter pain medications.
- **Use opioids sparingly.** If you're prescribed opioids after surgery or an injury, take as few as possible and stop as soon as you can. Non-[opioid](#) medications—such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or other treatments—may help manage pain.
- **Take opioids as prescribed.** Never combine them with alcohol or anxiety medications and don't take them for any reason other than [pain](#). If you're tempted to take opioids to feel happy or relaxed, you are in danger, the AAOS warns.
- **Store carefully.** Hide or lock away opioids so pets, children or other people won't find them. Keep them in their original packaging, which includes the patient's name and directions.
- **Get rid of leftovers.** Take unused opioids to a disposal unit in a pharmacy or police station. If your area does not have such a service, you can flush the drugs down the toilet or dispose of them safely in the garbage by mixing them with kitty litter or coffee grounds, or placing them in a sealed

plastic bag or container. Do not crush pills or capsules when throwing them away.

- **Protect your identity.** Always remove the label before throwing away an empty [medication](#) container.

**More information:** SOURCE: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, news release, Sept. 5, 2017

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [opioids](#).

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