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Treating pain safely, with and without opioids

By Elisa S. Mashal, MD, Mercy Care Plan
Percocet. Vicodin. Morphine. Oxycodone. These are a few of the opioid medicines you may have been given after having a tooth pulled, spraining your ankle or having minor surgery.

Every hour two people die in the U.S. by accident from prescription opioids (narcotic pain medicines). Most of these deaths are from taking other people's medicine. Besides the real risk of addiction to these drugs, if you take too much, you could stop breathing and die. The highest risk of overdose is in the first 24 to 48 hours. Taking them with alcohol or medicines for anxiety (like Valium, Ativan or Xanax) can increase the risk of death.

Prescription painkillers are cousins of heroin. In fact, 80 percent of people who use heroin started with prescription pills. New information just came out from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that tells us it only takes four to five days to become hooked on pain medicine.

When we see a doctor for pain, we want relief. Does relief mean zero pain? No. Pain is our body's way of telling us something is wrong. It's important for your doctor to find out what the problem is and treat it, so things don't get worse. Not all pain is treated the same way. Just like you need different antibiotics for different kinds of infections, different medicines treat different kinds of pain.

Taking ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) with acetaminophen (Tylenol) has actually been proven to work much better for a new pain. These over-the-counter pain relievers also work better than opioid

—Continued on page 2

Member Handbook

You can get this year's Member Handbook from Mercy Care Plan Member Services at no cost to you. They can also send you a copy of the Provider Directory at no cost to you.

Member Services is available Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., at **602-263-3000** or **1-800-624-3879** (TTY/TDD **711**).

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Health care across cultures

Beliefs. Customs. Values. They are key parts of your culture, religion or ethnic background. They help make you who you are. But what if your doctor comes from a different background? You may not share the same ideas about health, illness or medical treatment.

That doesn't mean you won't get great care. But to do so, you and your doctor should talk.

Don't let a language barrier block your road to good health. Ask for a translator.



For instance, be sure your doctor respects your views about:

- How you want to talk about your symptoms and other health issues
- Who should provide your treatment
- What treatments you may not want

Once your doctor knows and values your background and beliefs, it will be easier for you to stay healthy — and to get well if you get sick.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health; National Institutes of Health

Stay healthy: Get your flu shot

It comes on quickly. And it can make you miserable.

You cough, sneeze and ache all over. You may have a fever too — and be very tired.

This is what the flu can do. And anyone who's had it will agree: It's best to avoid it.

Luckily, there's a simple way to keep flu away: Get a yearly flu shot. It's quick. It's easy. And it's a smart

thing to do to protect yourself and others.

The shot is advised for nearly everyone 6 months of age and older. But it's especially important for people at high risk for flu complications. This includes:

- Those with ongoing health problems
- Pregnant women
- People 65 and older
- Children younger than 5 years old

Ask your doctor if and when you should get a flu shot.

Sources: American Academy of Family Physicians; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Health tip: Call your doctor if your fever won't go down. Also call if you have:

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- A cough that makes it hard to sleep

PCMH Corner

What is a PCMH?

Mercy Care Plan's provider network includes primary care doctors who are part of a new model of care called patient-centered medical homes (PCMH). When you choose to be a part of a PCMH, you will have a dedicated health care team. Their goal is to work with you to keep you healthy. They will make referrals; help arrange your care from labs, radiologists and specialists; and make sure you understand your health care information. If you need help, your team can help you with creating a plan to get back on track.

Good news

Your primary care doctor is a part of our PCMH care model. That means you already have a team of doctors, nurses and care specialists ready to help you. Ask your doctor for more information today.

Back to school: A checkup checklist

Most kids in Arizona start school in July and August. Back to school is a great time to make sure your child is healthy for the school year. All you have to do is pick up the phone. There is no copayment or charge for these health and dental checkups. By making appointments for your child, you'll help start the school year right.

Be sure to schedule the following:

- A well-child checkup.** A yearly exam may help to spot problems early. You can make sure immunizations are up-to-date and get answers to questions.
- An eye exam.** Seeing well can be key to doing well in school.
- A hearing screening.** Good hearing helps kids do well in school and interact with others. A screening may help identify possible concerns.
- A dental checkup.** Trouble with your child's teeth can make it hard to speak, eat and concentrate. A checkup



may prevent problems and protect your child's smile.

If these visits reveal health concerns, you should tell the staff at your child's school. They may be able to help.

Sources: American Academy of Otolaryngology — Head and Neck Surgery; American Academy of Pediatrics

HIV testing— why it matters

Getting tested for HIV — the virus that causes AIDS — can be scary.

But if there's any chance you're infected, it's important to find out. Here's why:

HIV can be successfully treated. In fact, starting treatment early — before symptoms appear — can keep AIDS from ever developing. AIDS is the

final stage of an HIV infection. If you have HIV, early treatment can help you lead a healthy, full life.

You can protect other people. If you're infected, finding out and getting treated reduces your risk of spreading the virus to somebody else.

If you're pregnant, you can protect your baby. Treating pregnant women who have HIV greatly reduces the risk that they'll pass on the virus to their babies.

So ask your doctor if you should be tested. And — if so — follow through. Testing is especially important if you're at an increased risk of HIV. Those at very high risk include men who have sex with men and people who inject drugs. Having unprotected sex also raises risk.

Sources: National Institutes of Health; U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

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This is general health information and should not replace the advice or care you get from your provider. Always ask your provider about your own health care needs.

Mercy Care Plan is administered by Aetna Medicaid Administrators, LLC, an Aetna company.

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