

# Painkiller overdose in women on the rise

By ACSH Staff — July 3, 2013

**painkillers** word or type unknown

<sup>[1]</sup>According to a [new CDC report](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, fatalities from overdosing on painkillers are on the rise among women. Compared to 1999, this rate is now five times higher. (It is also three times higher in men). That amounts to about 18 women per day, and most of those deaths are from prescription painkillers such as Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, and methadone.

Although medical experts are unsure why this is happening, a number of theories have been proposed: since women have smaller body mass than men, they overdose on smaller amounts of painkillers. Furthermore, studies have shown that women are more likely to experience chronic pain than men and therefore more likely to be given higher doses of painkillers. Consequently, they are more likely to use painkillers for longer periods of time than men. One suggestion is that there are more women addicts because society is changing and women are under more stress for example more women are now single parents. The CDC analysis also found that the rate of death from all drug overdoses was highest among women ages 45 to 54.

CDC director, Dr. Tom Frieden adds, "We need to better understand how dangerous these drugs are. They shouldn't be used lightly, (only) where they are essential, necessary, something like severe cancer pain, they are important tools. But all too often, the risks are way higher than the benefits because it may be a lifelong addiction." CDC urged women to use painkillers only as directed and discard extra medication when treatment is finished. And health providers should be more attuned to recognizing drug abuse patients.

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan wonders how women are able to obtain these drugs in such high doses. I would like to know what doctor is prescribing these medications to women in such high doses, as to result in drug overdose. Doctors really need to tread carefully in these situations and take precautions to recognize women at risk for abuse and addiction, as opposed to those who are truly in need of relief from chronic painful conditions.

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## Links

[1] <http://hsdispatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/painkillers.jpeg>

[2] [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-204\\_162-57592026/cdc-womens-painkiller-overdose-deaths-up-400-percent-over-last-decade/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-204_162-57592026/cdc-womens-painkiller-overdose-deaths-up-400-percent-over-last-decade/)