

Significant decline in prescription opioid abuse seen among Americans at last

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Almost 20 years into the opioid epidemic, there finally is evidence of significant and continual decreases in the abuse of these risky pain medications, according to an analysis of national data being presented at

the ANESTHESIOLOGY 2020 annual meeting.

The rate of prescription opioids fell 26% between 2007 and 2018, according to the researchers' analysis of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an annual survey of about 70,000 Americans age 12 and older asking about their use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

For the analysis, prescription opioid [abuse](#) was defined as use without the consent of a physician. While opioids can be beneficial for short-term relief, in most cases they should not be used long-term because of their significant side effects and risk for addiction.

"Prior research has shown slight reductions in abuse rates, but our analysis shows we're tracking statistically significant year-to-year declines in abuse, indicating that the decrease is not an anomaly and truly represents a trend in falling prescription drug abuse levels," said Mario Moric, M.S., lead author of the study and a biostatistician at Rush University Medical Center, Chicago. "We believe the message of the dangers of [opioid](#) use without supervision of a medical professional is finally getting through and changing people's mindset and behavior."

In 2007, 4.9% of the respondents said they had abused [prescription pain medications](#) the previous year. In 2018 (the most recent year for which data are available), 3.7% said they had done so. The difference represents a 26% decrease in abuse. The [analysis](#) showed significant declines from 2012 to 2018, with the exception of 2015, when higher numbers were reported due to a survey redesign introduced that year.

"Pain medications such as opioids are an important resource in the treatment and care of patients, but they are not a cure-all," said Asokumar Buvanendran, M.D., co-author of the study, chair of the American Society of Anesthesiologists Committee on Pain Medicine and executive vice chair of anesthesiology at Rush University Medical

Center. "Since opioids have risks and can be highly addictive, they should be used only under the supervision of a physician who can consider their safety and how the medication will affect a patient over time. Prescribers and patients are now better armed with the information they need to make educated choices in [pain](#) management."

Provided by American Society of Anesthesiologists

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