

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

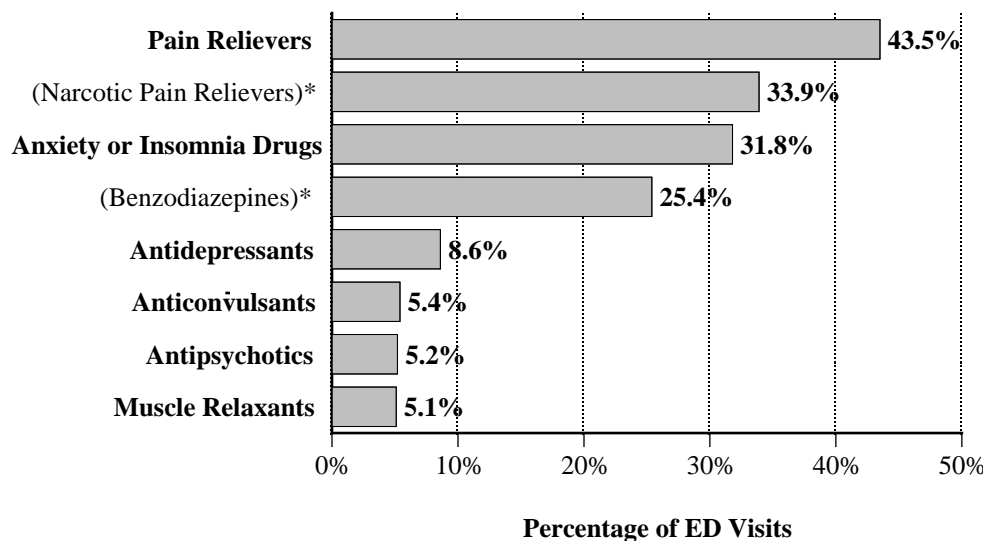
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Pain Relievers Most Common Drug Involved in Emergency Department Visits for Pharmaceutical Misuse or Abuse by Older Adults

In 2008 there were an estimated 256,097 emergency department visits by adults ages 50 or older involving the misuse and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs—more than double the estimated 115,803 visits in 2004. According to data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), pain relievers were the type of pharmaceutical most commonly involved in such visits (43.5%), followed by anxiety or insomnia drugs (31.8%; see figure below). In addition, one-fifth of the ED visits related to pharmaceutical misuse or abuse also involved alcohol (data not shown). The authors suggest that “education for caregivers about the abuse potential of certain medications and the early warning signs of abuse may be needed” and that “prevention messages that target older adults could warn against the dangerous combination of alcohol and pharmaceuticals.” (p. 3).

Selected Drugs Involved in Emergency Department (ED) Visits for Pharmaceutical Misuse or Abuse, Adults Ages 50 or Older, 2008

(N=an estimated 256,097 visits)



*“Narcotic Pain Relievers” are also included in the category “Pain Relievers”. “Benzodiazepines” are also included in the category “Anxiety or Insomnia Drugs”.

NOTES: The category “Pharmaceutical Misuse and Abuse” are drug misuse and abuse ED visits excluding those involving alcohol and illicit drugs. Because multiple drugs may be involved in each visit, percentages may add to more than 100 percent.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), “Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits Involving Pharmaceutical Misuse and Abuse by Older Adults,” *The DAWN Report*, November 25, 2010. Available online at <https://dawninfo.samhsa.gov/pubs/shortreports/default.asp>.