**Taking prescription painkillers and sleeping pills at the same time increases your chance of an overdose**

* **Mixing prescribed painkillers and sleeping pills increases overdose chance**
* **Study of 300,000 showed the drug combination increased risk of hospital trip**
* **Stanford University researchers called for more awareness of possible risks**

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Taking prescription painkillers with sleeping pills could lead to an overdose, scientists warn.

Combining opiods with benzodiazepines was linked to more hospital visits for the potentially fatal complication, a study found.

Researchers now say opioids should be prescribed cautiously among patients who are also taking benzodiazepines.

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Opioids can increase the risk of an overdose when taken at the same time as some pills used to treat insomnia or anxiety, experts warn

They also called for education programmes that warn doctors and patients about the risks of taking both medications at the same time.

In many countries, the increased use of prescription painkillers and the resulting potential for addiction and overdose represent a growing public health concern.

Nearly 30 per cent of fatal 'opioid' overdoses in the US also involve benzodiazepines.

That raises the possibility that some of the increase in opioid related deaths might be caused by simultaneous use of benzodiazepines.

Stanford University researchers set out to identify trends in concurrent use of a benzodiazepine and an opioid.

They wanted to identify the impact of the trends on admissions to hospital and emergency room visits for opioid overdose.

Combining opiods with benzodiazepines was linked to more hospital visits for the potentially fatal complication, a study found

The study involved more than 300,000 people aged 18 to 64 who were prescribed the form of painkiller between 2001 and 2013.

They found that nine per cent of users also had a prescription for a benzodiazepine in 2001. This increased to 17 per cent in 2013.

Several factors that could have affected the results - such as age, sex and presence of other disorders - were then taken into account.

Compared with opioid users who didn't take benzodiazepines, concurrent use of both drugs was associated with a substantially higher risk of a hospital visit for opioid overdose.

The researchers said it was an observational study, so no firm conclusions can be drawn about cause and effect.

Stopping the use of benzodiazepines and opioids at the same time could reduce the population risk of an emergency room visit or inpatient admission by 15 per cent, lead author Dr Eric Sun claimed.

But the researchers warned that while concern about concurrent use of painkillers and benzodiazepines has led to warnings and guidelines, they are unlikely to change clinical behaviour, at least not quickly.

They point out that, unless systems are set up to push information to providers, 'busy clinicians will struggle to keep up with their patients' use of different prescriptions.'

Dr Sun said: 'A multi-pronged effort from both regulators and experts writing clinical guidelines, along with extensive expansion in warnings about the hazards of drug-drug interactions, are essential to reduce low value, potentially dangerous care.'

The research comes after it was found taking some common painkillers increases the risk of a heart attack by up to 50 per cent.

Scientists from Copehagen University Hospital said the painkiller diclofenac was so dangerous, it shouldn't be taken at all.

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