

## Soldiers Almost Four Times More Likely Than Civilians to Use Prescription Painkillers

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Soldiers are almost four times more likely than civilians to use prescription opioids to treat their pain, researchers at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research have found.

Almost half of U.S. soldiers returning home report chronic pain.

Three months after returning home from Afghanistan or Iraq, about 44 percent of members of an Army infantry brigade said they suffered chronic pain. In contrast, the rate of chronic pain among civilians is about 26 percent, according to *HealthDay*.

The researchers report in *JAMA Internal Medicine* that about 15 percent of the soldiers reported using narcotic painkillers in the past month, compared with 4 percent of civilians.

The main source of chronic pain among returning soldiers appears to be combat injuries, the article notes. The researchers defined chronic pain as lasting 90 days or more. Soldiers with a combat injury are almost three times more likely to say they have chronic pain, and twice as likely to take a narcotic painkiller, as those without a combat injury.

The study found 48 percent of soldiers reporting chronic pain said it had lasted a year or longer, while 55 percent said they had daily or constant pain.

"War is really hard on the body," said study author Lt. Cmdr. Robin Toblin. "People come home with a lot of injuries, and as you can imagine they experience a lot of pain. There seems to be a large unmet need of management, treatment and assessment of chronic pain."

Soldiers who suffer from depression or post-traumatic stress disorder were twice as likely to report chronic pain, the study found. The findings come from confidential surveys completed by almost 2,600 soldiers.