

Why is this of concern to a chiropractor? A patient recently told me of having, over a three year period consumed over 3000 tablets and wait for it they were prescribed!!

Call for laws to restrict access to Nurofen Plus

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Alarming cases of people swallowing handfuls of Nurofen Plus tablets have led to calls for tougher laws for the over-the-counter codeine-ibuprofen pills, including smaller pack sizes and larger pack warnings.

Three years after the federal government made access to the drug harder, Matthew Frei, clinical director of Melbourne's Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre, says he hasn't noticed any reduction in codeine-ibuprofen abuse.

The new laws in 2010 prevented pharmacists from handing over more than five days' supply of codeine, but determined users can still gather handfuls of the drug by visiting dozens of pharmacies a week.

"It's always going to be a small group but we're still getting a flow of people coming through reporting it's a drug they are getting into strife with," Dr Frei said.

For some, it's a 50 to 70 tablet-a-day habit that risks a grisly list of potential side effects, including horrific organ damage and, in the worst cases, death.

Albury retail worker Lisa accidentally developed a Nurofen Plus addiction in 2009, at a time when fuelling her habit was as easy as visiting a pharmacy and pulling a couple of super-size packets off the shelf.

After the law changes, she had to make up fake ailments to get her fix. The 33-year-old mother would travel to a different pharmacy at lunch and after work and spend her days off visiting four or five different stores to build up her stores.

"I remember going to the chemist for wisdom teeth pain and it was absolutely genuine and I ended up taking too many ... It's terrible to say, but it actually got me high," she said.

Addiction specialist Professor Bob Batey said reducing pack sizes by half or even making Nurofen Plus a prescription-only drug would make it more difficult to abuse.

At her lowest, Lisa forced down 30 tablets in the morning and more than 20 more in the afternoon, stashing the pills in make-up bags and mattresses to keep her habit from her husband.

She had many relapses before she kicked the habit for good last year, after counselling and an 18-month opioid substitution program.

But at no point in the three years she made up lies about migraines and sore wisdom teeth was she ever turned away without a pack of pills in hand. "I was never refused. Not once," she said.