

#ESAGeneva: Older Patients Have Higher Pain Tolerance



According to new research presented at this year's Euroanaesthesia meeting in Geneva, age plays an important role in the level of pain experienced after major surgery and that older people are better able to tolerate serious post-operative pain. However, findings suggest that the impact on pain on physical function does not decline and that older patients may be experiencing pain but not admitting to it.

Most patients experience pain after common operations but perceptions of pain intensity, impairments caused by pain and the effectiveness of pain relief differs in patients depending on the type of surgery, gender, age and medication. Prior research suggests that reports of maximum pain decline with increasing age.

During this study, the researchers wanted to confirm these findings and wanted to determine if age influences other outcomes like pain-related functional impairment. They used data from PAIN OUT, an international project that collects patient-reported outcome data on day 1 after surgery. Researchers then examined the intensity of pain and its interference in physical activity in 2390 patients who underwent total knee replacement. Both the independent variable of age and dependent variable of functional impairment were measured using standard rating scales.

Findings showed that pain scores decreased with increasing age but functional impairment scores did not. The authors thus conclude "that the older the patients, the lower their reported maximum pain levels. However, elderly patients do not report less functional impairment caused by pain. As functional impairment is a more clinically relevant factor for postoperative recovery pain intensity, these findings suggest that elderly patients might tend to under-report their pain levels, and that asking about functional impairment might be a better tool for pain assessment."

It may be that older patients do not admit that they are suffering from pain due to social reasons or they may think that the pain is normal or that they should just bear it without complaining. Thus these pain levels may be under-reported.

Source: [ESA](#)

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Published on : Sun, 4 Jun 2017