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Injuries Can Put Teen Athletes on Path to Addiction

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As a high-school football player, John Haskell was used to getting banged around. But his fourth concussion was a game-changer — because a doctor prescribed a powerful painkiller for his throbbing head.

"He looked in my ears, checked my hearing, checked my eyes. And the next thing I know, I'm at CVS getting Vicodin," the teen said.

At just 15 years old, Haskell joined a different kind of club: student athletes who get hooked on opioids, and sometimes graduate to street drugs, after getting hurt on the field.

Haskell developed a dependence on pain pills and then got addicted to heroin, which was even cheaper. Now 18, he is sober and doing well, but experts say his experience should serve as a warning for other injured players and their families.

"As a parent, you need to take a more advocating role and ask your provider why are they going this route?" said Dr. Harold Shinitzky, a sports psychologist. "Why is it automatically an opioid or a painkiller?"

For more on Haskell's story, watch our TODAY show report on young athletes who go from chasing their dreams to chasing a high.