

Alternative Therapies for Addiction

by Rita Milios

Using alternative therapies as part of an addiction treatment program is hardly “alternative” anymore. Many addiction treatment centers now boast offerings such as biofeedback, yoga, biochemical restoration treatments (strategically restoring nutritional balance), herbal remedies, and a variety of meditation practices including Transcendental Meditation, Mindfulness Meditation, and Qigong. In addition, researchers are now taking seriously these once academically shunned options.

Here’s why you might want to consider some alternatives in your recovery program:

- ***Acupuncture is Sanctioned by WHO for Treatment of Drug Abuse***

According to an NIH report in the online journal *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* (Feb. 2012), in 1996, the World Health Organization (WHO) listed 64 medical problems that were considered suitable for acupuncture treatment, including the treatment of drug abuse. Acupuncture stimulates the release of the brain chemical dopamine, and evidence suggests that this can help reduce cravings for illicit substances in addicts. It has become one of the most widely used alternative treatments for substance abuse, often included as part of a detoxification program.

The National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA), a not-for-profit training and advocacy organization, was started in 1974 to encourage the use of standardized acupuncture protocol for a variety of behavioral health issues, including addictions.

- ***Biofeedback Can Rehabilitate Damaged Brain Waves***

Biofeedback involves connecting a person to electrical sensors in order to generate information (feedback) about what is happening in that person’s body (bio). There are different types of biofeedback that measure breathing, heart rate, temperature, etc., but the type most often used in substance abuse treatment is brainwave biofeedback, sometimes called *neurofeedback*.

An article in *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* (Mar. 2008) reported tentative findings to suggest that biofeedback could be an effective protocol to predict the likelihood of relapse for addicts in treatment. Reduced alpha brain waves (associated with relaxation) and increased beta brain waves (associated with arousal) were found more often in subjects who relapsed within six months of treatment.

By providing feedback about when success is achieved, brain wave biofeedback training can teach subjects to increase their own production of alpha—and sometimes even theta—brain waves (ones that are produced in the deepest of relaxation states).

Brainwave biofeedback training is a promising new protocol that has also shown promise in reducing symptoms of depression. It is believed that slower, more relaxed brain waves induce mental states where access to greater insight becomes available to the subject, and that such heightened insight can enhance recovery.

- ***Yoga Aligns the Body, Mind and Spirit and Increases Inner Peace***

Yoga, which means “union” in Sanskrit, uses a focus on breath, posture, and meditation to increase the production of positive brain chemicals and provide relief from stress, anxiety, and depression. According to an article, *Yoga as Adjunct Therapy for Substance Use* by April Dawn Ricchuito, DD, MSW (*Social Work Today*; Vol. 12 No. 5), Alan Leshner, PhD, formerly of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, believes that yoga can restore brain chemistry that has been “hijacked” by substance use.

Practice of yoga “asanas,” or postures, also helps recovering addicts increase awareness and reduce impulsiveness, and therefore lead to decisions to make positive changes.

- ***Targeted Nutritional Therapy May Help Repair Cells Damaged by Substance Use***

Biochemist Genita M. Petralli, H.H.P., N.C., author of *Alcoholism: The Cause & The Cure* and *Green Body & Mind: Staying Healthy in a Toxic World*, believes that integrated nutritional treatment that addresses all the physical and mental health damage specific to the use of substances can restore brain chemistry, healthy brain functioning, and physical health.

A key component of Dr. Kantor’s Nutritional Plan for Substance Abuse Recovery suggests strictly avoiding foods that stimulate the brain’s opiate receptors, such as simple sugars, artificial sweeteners, gluten, milk protein, and caffeine. —*Rita Milios*

Orthomolecular Medicine & Body Burden Detoxification program is based on the theory that illness can be treated and health maximized by creating the optimal molecular environment for the cells of the body through the introduction of natural substances.

Dr. Keith Kantor, CEO of a program named NAMED, created a comprehensive nutritional plan that addresses the problem of “over-stimulated” opiate receptors in the brains of substance abusers. His theory suggests that when opiate receptors are stimulated, this creates cravings for addictive substances such as drugs, alcohol, and even certain foods; but if the opiate receptors are suppressed (for instance, by targeted nutritional therapy), the potential for success in addiction recovery is increased.

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- ***Meditation Can Reduce Cravings, Increase Abstinence, Bring Relief From Emotional Distress and Encourage Personal Empowerment***

Meditation, in a variety of forms, provides what is perhaps the widest range of positive effects of all the commonly used alternative therapies. Meditation helps “retrain” the brain’s reward centers

by increasing conscious (mindful) awareness of subliminal craving cues and decreasing the perceived potency of cues/triggers. It also “de-automates” negative habituated behaviors (which leads to better choice-making) and enhances self-awareness and self-esteem.

A study on Integrative Qigong Meditation (IQM), a Chinese practice that blends relaxation, breathing, guided imagery, and mindfulness, found that Qigong practice reduced cravings and lessened withdrawal symptoms.

Katie Witkiewitz, an associate professor of psychology at the University of New Mexico, reported in the journal *Substance Use & Misuse* (April, 2014) that a mindfulness-based program for substance use disorders was more effective than a traditional relapse prevention program in decreasing substance use and heavy drinking up to one year later.

Transcendental Meditation has been studied for its use in assisting with the reduction of substance abuse, both by the Transcendental Meditation Organization and by other researchers as well. Charles Alexander, Pat Robinson, and Maxwell Rainforth, in an article, “Self-recovery: Treating Addictions Using Transcendental Meditation and Maharishi Ayur-Veda”, published in *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* (Vol 11, 1994), found that:

Transcendental Meditation, compared to other forms of meditation and relaxation, significantly reversed physiological and psychological factors [of] substance abuse, and the abstinence was maintained over time.

Despite a mounting body of research, controversy remains among many recovery professionals as to whether “alternative” treatments can hold their own. But the dominant view in the profession is that alternative treatments can be highly effective when used as complements to traditional treatment, and can especially help those in recovery better manage the early stages of sobriety.