

You should stop drinking water. You should never have it again. You are addicted to it.

That idea doesn't sound very reasonable does it?

The same part of the brain that regulates hunger and thirst is involved with chemical dependency. To an addict, it may feel just as impossible to stop using their drug of choice as it is for you to stop drinking water. There are, however, a number of integrative medicine approaches that can give support to addicts who are recovering from physical addictions.

Addictive drugs work by stimulating receptors that the brain naturally has. These receptors exist so that the natural balance of neurotransmitters gives a healthy person a sense of well being. Addictive drugs hijack this delicate system to produce short term overstimulation of receptors.

The body responds by decreasing production of the neurotransmitters that naturally dock at the overstimulated receptors. Receptor sites may also change to prefer the substance that stimulates them more. The net effect is a neurotransmitter shortage that creates many of the symptoms of withdrawal.

The neurotransmitters most often affected are enkephalins, endorphins, dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin and GABA. Nutritional supplements can be used to support low levels of these neurotransmitters. All supplement suggestions are in addition to the basics: a multiple vitamin with b-complex, a multiple mineral and a fish oil supplement.

Enkephalins and endorphins are the bodies natural pain relievers. Addiction to pain pills, heroin, alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and sweets may reduce the level of these pain relieving neurotransmitters for up to six months.

The levels of enkephalins and endorphins can be increased by taking the amino acid DL-Phenylalanine. This amino acid may reduce physical and emotional pain in addicts. Typical dosing is 1.5gm 1 hour before or 2 hours after meals.

Dopamine increases a sense of pleasure. Low dopamine creates intense cravings. Caffeine, amphetamines, cocaine, marijuana, aspartame, alcohol, tobacco and sweets reduce both of these neurotransmitters. The body can make norepinephrine from dopamine.

Dopamine levels can be increased by taking L-Tyrosine. Typical dosing is 1.5gm three times daily 1 hour before or 2 hours after meals. Idebenone 45mg twice daily is also an effective dopamine builder.

For severe cases, especially in cocaine or methamphetamine addictions, NADH may be added at 10mg under the tongue up to three times daily. NADH is pricey but effective. Compared to the price of most addict's drug of choice, even this more expensive supplement is still a good deal.

Norepinephrine, also known as noradrenalin, helps regulate attention, impulsivity, and fight/flight/freeze adrenal reactions. A high stress life, caffeine, amphetamines, cocaine, marijuana, aspartame, alcohol, tobacco and sweets both of this neurotransmitters. Norepinephrine is supported with the same supplements that support dopamine.

Serotonin is the neurotransmitter most often manipulated by prescription medications for depression. Ecstasy, marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, and sweets all decrease serotonin.

The most effective precursor for serotonin available over-the-counter is 5-HTP. I typically recommend 100mg at bedtime. The dose may be increased 50mg at a time to a maximum of 200mg three times daily. Avoid taking a formula with B6. Although B6 helps turn tryptophan into serotonin, it may do so before the tryptophan crosses the blood brain barrier. Serotonin will not cross that barrier. Do not take 5-HTP if you are taking psychiatric medications.

GABA is depleted by alcohol and benzodiazepines such as Valium, Xanax, or Ativan. It promotes calmness.

GABA release may be stimulated by L-Glutamine. It is available in a powder form. Many people who use glutamine to increase GABA levels use as much as 3.5gm three times daily.

These methods of supporting recovery do not replace the help of a professional. Discuss any supplements you wish to take with your healthcare professionals. A 12 step program, acupuncturist, qualified counselor or rehabilitation facility, and doctor may all work together to create your best chance at recovery.

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