

How a Combination of Traditional and Alternative Therapy Can Help Fight Drug Addiction

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Opinion

Drug addiction is a complex disease, and as such, the process of getting clean is also complex. Drugs alter the way brains function, and quitting is never an easy road. Addiction treatment typically utilizes

multiple methods in order to aid addicts in recovery. Rehabilitation, therapy, and alternative methods (Figure 1) are combined in most cases.



Figure 1: Traditional and Alternative therapy of Drug Addiction.

What is Addiction?

Addiction is a chronic disease that is compulsive and difficult to control, despite addicts knowing the harmful consequences of partaking in their addiction. Addiction changes the way the brain functions so that self-control isn't possible. Most drugs amp up dopamine in the brain, altering the reward system, which "controls the body's ability to feel pleasure and motivates a person to repeat behaviours needed to thrive".

Long-term use also alters learning, memory, decision-making, memory, stress, and overall behaviour. Brain changes remain even

years after completing addiction treatment, which is why addicts are always at risk for relapse and must continue treatment even after becoming clean. Just as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes cannot be cured, neither can addiction. Mental health interventions combined with rehab are classic treatments, but alternative methods like yoga, swimming, and meditation can be just as beneficial.

Rehabilitation and Therapy

Although treatment can be provided through outpatient or inpatient settings, the latter is more common. Residential facilities typically focus on detoxification, providing initial intensive treatment,

and preparation for a return to society. Outpatient services can be provided through partial hospitalization or intensive outpatient treatment. Both settings may use medications to treat substance use disorders, which reduce cravings and symptoms of withdrawal.

Counselling can also take place in either setting and is often used even years after becoming sober. Both group and individual sessions are offered. Cognitive-behavioural therapy, contingency management, motivational enhancement therapy, and 12-step programs are popular therapies in addiction treatment. Alternative methods are becoming more and more popular, as well, and religion/religious methods are also still common.

Alternative Methods

Yoga can help addicts work their way through rehab and can be used to stay sober after rehab is completed. Exercise, including yoga, boosts serotonin levels, which elevates mood, so instead of looking to drugs to feel good, people can perform yoga, go for a swim, or ride a bike. A hobby such as yoga also prevents boredom, which can be a trigger for some people. Stress and anxiety can afflict recovering addicts, and yoga is a way to healthily deal with these negative emotions.

Meditation is another way to deal with negative emotions. Part of meditation involves learning mindfulness, which “helps us develop the capacity to see clearly exactly what we’re attached to so that we can let go of it and end our suffering,” as *Psychology Today* says. It also teaches you to be in control your emotions. Yoga, meditation, and exercise help lower cortisol (the stress hormone) levels.

While getting clean, addicts often let go of their past social lives and friends who use to avoid any triggers. This results in a new free time. Exercise, like swimming, running, or biking, can help fill up that free time in a meaningful way. It provides a structure to the day and helps recovering addicts feel more in control of their bodies and health. Exercise also decreases stress and anxiety, regulates sleep, and improves cognitive function—all things that help those in recovery stay clean.

The road to recovery from addiction requires more than good intentions or strong will. Addicts need a combination of methods to help rewire the brain away from drug addiction. While rehab and counselling are go-to methods of treatment, alternative methods like yoga, meditation, and exercise, are great sources for addicts to use to fight addiction, get their lives back on track, and stay sober.