Exercise May Be a Highly Effective Option for Alcoholics

Alcohol abuse is disruptive of circadian rhythms, and circadian disruptions can also lead to alcohol abuse. A new study examining the relationship between alcohol intake and wheel-running in hamsters has found that exercise may reduce alcohol intake by regulating circadian rhythms.

The study found that the more the hamsters ran, the less they consumed alcohol. Hamsters that did not run as much had a greater craving for alcohol. This suggests that exercise may be an effective, beneficial, and non-pharmacologic treatment for alcoholism.

Science Daily reports:

"A second key finding was that hamsters that displayed greater sensitivity to the disruptive effects of constant light on circadian rhythms also craved alcohol less ..."

Thus, there may be an underlying genetic predisposition for alcohol dependence and abuse that is expressed under challenging circadian conditions ... such as shift work, sleep problems or repeated jet-lag exposure."

Sources:

- Science Daily June 23, 2010
- Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research June 21, 2010
Comments:

If you or someone you love has been affected by alcohol abuse, you know the great toll it can take on your personal relationships, work life and ability to function normally on a day-to-day basis.

The cravings for alcohol can become all-consuming and eventually an alcoholic does not feel “normal” until they’ve had a drink. The alcohol abuse inevitably throws off your circadian rhythm -- the normal times you eat, sleep and wake up -- as well, leading to a downward spiral of health and emotional effects.

J. David Glass, professor of biological sciences at Kent State University and corresponding author of the above study, told Science Daily:

"With continual alcohol use, one may go to bed too early or late, not sleep across the night, and have an unusual eating regime, eating little throughout the day and/or overeating at night.

This can lead to a vicious cycle of drinking because these individuals, in response, will consume more alcohol to fall asleep easier only to complain of more disrupted sleep across the night and additionally have a greater craving for alcohol."

However, the researchers uncovered an incredibly effective and safe solution that not only helps to reduce alcohol intake but also works to help regulate your circadian rhythm … and it’s a habit that can benefit you in profound ways for the rest of your life …

Exercise.

Why Exercise is Crucial for Alcoholics

When you drink, it chemically alters your brain to release dopamine, a chemical your brain associates with rewarding behaviors. When you exercise, this same reward chemical is released, which means you can get the same “buzz” from working out that you can get from a six-pack of beer, with far better outcomes for your health.

This is why, if you know you’re prone to alcohol abuse or have a family history of alcohol addiction, exercising regularly can greatly reduce your risk of becoming dependent.
For those already addicted, exercise is beneficial too, and may actually help to lessen cravings. The new study found, in fact, that hamsters that ran the most consumed less alcohol, while less active hamsters had greater cravings for and consumption of alcohol. Alan M. Rosenwasser, professor of psychology at the University of Maine, told Science Daily:

“It seems that alcohol intake and voluntary exercise represent two forms of inherently rewarding behavior, and the rewarding effects of these two behaviors may partially substitute for one another. This finding suggests that the two behaviors are regulated by overlapping systems in the brain.”

By replacing drinking with exercise, you may find that the rewarding feeling you get from exercise provides you with a suitable alternative to the rewarding feeling you previously got from alcohol.

It’s similar to what happens when people attempt to quit smoking before they’ve cleaned up their lifestyle. Ordinarily, many people will have a tendency to replace one bad habit with another, giving up cigarettes for junk food binges, for instance. With alcohol, too, when you quit you may be drawn to other unhealthy addictions like cigarettes, fast food, or soda, especially if you don’t have a healthier replacement already in the queue.

Exercise can provide an invaluable alternative to virtually any addiction, as it activates your brain's pleasure centers in much the same way as alcohol, cigarettes and drugs do, only with healthful, instead of detrimental, side effects to your mental and physical well-being.

**Exercise Can Help You Stay Sober**

Once you’ve stopped drinking, a vigorous exercise program can help you to achieve long-term sobriety. For starters, exercise is one of the best forms of stress relief out there, capable of boosting your mood and fighting off depressive symptoms if you’re having a hard day.

It will also increase your physical fitness, self-esteem and confidence, giving you much needed support during those difficult first weeks of recovery. Vigorous exercise also occupies your time and your mind, so you’re not sitting around feeling tempted to take a drink. You'll sleep better and feel stronger, too, all while producing endorphins in your brain that give you an extra “feel-good” boost.
It's no wonder, then, that researchers have been documenting the positive impacts of exercise on addiction recovery for decades now.

Back in 1982, David Sinyor and colleagues published a study showing that 69 percent of recovering alcoholics whose treatment program included daily vigorous exercise stayed sober for three months following treatment. On the other hand, 62 percent of those whose treatment contained no exercise had relapsed within that same timeframe.

When an addiction is involved, it may be beneficial to hire a personal trainer who can help you to stay motivated and challenged during the early weeks of training. At the very least, you'll want to be sure that your exercise program is appropriately varied to include strength training, aerobics, flexibility and core training, along with peak fitness to boost your production of growth hormone.

I am now firmly convinced that you need to have VIGOROUS exercise to receive this benefit. Although walking around the block is better than laying on the sofa watching TV, it is rarely going to be a sufficient exercise for anyone unless the person is massively obese or very seriously compromised, such as someone with heart failure and an ejection fraction of 15%.

Typically you will need to move your body fast enough to get your heart rate to maximum (220-your age). That is why I like the Peak 8 exercises so much, as they can get you fit very quickly without that much time investment.

Twenty minutes of a Peak 8 exercise will provide most people with more benefits than 1-2 hours of typical cardio exercises done at a leisurely pace.

Regular Exercise Should be Part of Every Treatment Program

No matter what your current fitness level, committing to a regular exercise program, and getting some type of physical activity most days of the week, is an incredibly effective way to help kick your alcohol addiction and stay sober for good.

Exercise can be used along with other treatments, such as 12-step programs, counseling, or by using the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), with only positive synergistic effects. And remember, whether you struggle with an addiction to alcohol, cigarettes, prescription drugs, junk food or virtually anything else, exercise can be your secret weapon to finally kick the habit and stay clean.