

Alcoholism and PTSD Can be Safely Treated Together



Alcoholism and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be safely treated together, a new study concludes.

The study addresses concerns that treating PTSD could worsen alcoholism by bringing up painful memories. About one-third of people with PTSD also develop some level of alcohol dependence, the article notes.

Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania studied 165 people with both conditions. They were assigned to one of four treatment groups. One group received naltrexone, a drug that reduces alcohol cravings, and prolonged exposure therapy, which helps PTSD patients confront painful memories or situations. Another group received naltrexone and general counseling, a third group received prolonged exposure therapy and placebo pills, and a fourth group received placebo pills and support counseling.

After six months, all patients had a lower percentage of drinking days, and reduced cravings. Those taking naltrexone had a lower percentage of drinking days, compared with those taking placebo pills. Patients treated with prolonged exposure therapy and naltrexone had a drinking relapse rate of 5.4 percent, compared with 13.3 percent for those on a placebo who received supportive counseling.

"What we found is that those people that got (medication) plus prolonged exposure therapy for alcohol dependence together with the treatment for PTSD did the best for maintaining their low level of drinking," said lead author Edna Foa. "If you are trying to treat the alcohol addiction without any treatment of the PTSD what will happen is that they will stop drinking and the PTSD will become more severe, so what they will do is start drinking again."

The findings appear in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.