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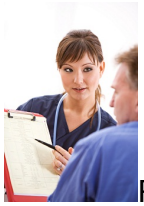
Researchers Make Progress in Finding Medicines to Treat Addiction



Researchers are making progress in the search for medicines to treat addiction, according to *The Wall Street Journal.*

They are learning more about how heavy drug and alcohol use affects the brain.

A study published recently in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found the drug gabapentin, used to treat epilepsy and some types of pain, can help people with alcoholism quit drinking.

The 12-week study of 150 alcohol-dependent participants found gabapentin decreased the number of days people drank heavily, and at least tripled the percentage of people who were able to stop drinking altogether, compared with those receiving a placebo. The drug also reduced alcohol craving and improved mood and sleep quality.

"There's been a huge amount of progress understanding what drives alcoholism and makes it difficult to stop," lead researcher Barbara Mason of the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California, told the newspaper.

Researchers at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism are studying a chemical called corticotrophin-releasing factor (CRF), which plays a role in the brain's stress response. It is triggered by drug or alcohol use. Years of heavy substance use makes the brain more sensitive to CRF, the article notes. Paul Kenny, who studies addiction at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, says that in people who are addicted, the brain's stress response becomes stuck in high gear.

NIAAA is conducting studies of two experimental drugs, to see if they can stop CRF from revving up the brain's stress centers in alcoholics.

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 23.1 million people aged 12 or older needed treatment for illicit drug or alcohol use in 2012. Of these, only 2.5 million received treatment at a specialty facility.