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Herbs for Addiction Withdrawal

By Brian B. Carter, MS, LAc

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Help! I'm Addicted to the Painkillers I Bought Online!

Q: Hi. I am definitely addicted to tramadol (Ultram). I have tried to stop the drug several times, but the withdrawal symptoms are so unbearable (depression; diarrhea; lethargy; sweats; aching body much more worse than ever before taking the drug, especially upon waking up in the morning; irritability; increase in tremor), that I get through a day or two and then I know that just "one" will take the withdrawal symptoms away, so back on the drug again!!! I know I am addicted (been buying the drug over the net from Thailand). I started taking the drug for aches and pains because it was "non-narcotic" and "non-habit forming – yeah right!!!! (I have no medical insurance at this time).

Well, for me, it also produces a "euphoric" type of feeling, like I can get more accomplished when I take it. However, I had no problem getting things done before I ever took the drug!!! I noticed you have "Ultram" listed under the "Treatment" heading (first paragraph), and so now I know I am not abnormal (I guess this must be addictive for many people!!!). At any rate, I really do want to quit taking this drug. I also have essential tremor (familial – mother had it) and am taking diazepam for the tremor (about 10 mg/day, no more than 20 mg/day, and that's only if I am going to be in a very uncomfortable social situation). I can even go without the diazepam. When I have tried to stop using the tramadol (Ultram), my head tremor gets worse. If I could, I would just hide at home for a week or so and detox; I would have no problem doing that, but I have to function for work, day-to-day LIFE, etcetera (no vacation time, and Monday comes around pretty quickly, hence me only getting through two days of trying to detox). Please.....Do you have any suggestions on herbs, etcetera to help ease withdrawal from tramadol?.....just so I can function somewhat during the detox/withdrawal period. Also, do you have any experience with other cases of withdrawal from this drug, and if so.....how long do the extreme symptoms last? Thank you so much for your time. T.S.

A: Right on, T.S.. It's great that you can admit you have a problem with it.

While browsing online, I was pretty amazed by how many addictive prescription drugs you could buy illegally. The websites said, "comes in a discrete package," and "nobody needs to know!" I understand that sometimes people are recommended drugs that are embarrassing to be on... but the dangers here

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are misuse, addiction, and overdose.

If I can beat an old drum for a minute, drugs should be prescribed by doctors, and chinese herbs by acupuncturist/herbalists. As you know from your experience, it's dangerous to treat yourself– even doctors shouldn't do that.

However, there are some legitimate websites that allow you to buy your prescriptions online. They require a doctor's prescription, as they should. The main advantage of using an online pharmacy is much lower prices than your local drugstore. Check out Imported Drugs.com.

It's not my place to recommend what to do with meds that are already being taken... even though it's a

little different when you're taking self–prescribed, illegally–purchased meds. It's best to work with an MD and an acupuncturist/herbalist. What the literature suggests is:

Quitting Ultram

One should TAPER off the Ultram rather than just suddenly stopping. That means reducing the dosage gradually over a number of days or weeks.

Herbs and Acupuncture for Withdrawal from Addictive Drugs

NADA (the proven ear acupuncture detox protocol – more about that in my article on Acupuncture and Addiction) could make the withdrawal period easier. So would the formulas:

Chai Hu Long Gu Mu Li Tang (Bupleurum Dragon Bone and Oyster Shell) and
Xiao Chai Hu Tang (Minor Bupleurum)

The first one (Chai Hu Long Gu Mu Li Tang) would be better for someone with a tremor disorder. Neither formula should be taken longer than a couple of months.

Instead of Painkilling Drugs...

Your prospects in the future for treating the aches and pains and tremor would be great with acupuncture and chinese herbs. I would suggest you find an acupuncturist in your area and see them for at least a few months.

Anything else you need, please let me know!

All the best,
Brian

Acupuncturist, herbalist, and medical professor Brian B. Carter founded the alternative health megasite The Pulse of Oriental Medicine (<http://www.PulseMed.org/>). He is the author of the book "Powerful Body, Peaceful Mind: How to Heal Yourself with Foods, Herbs, and Acupressure" (November, 2004). Brian speaks on radio across the country, and has been quoted and interviewed by Real Simple, Glamour, and ESPN magazines.

Drug Rehab: Do You Need It?

By Abhilash Patel

Drug Rehab: Do You Need It?

Do you have an addiction? The question shouldn't be hard to answer. There are fairly clear lines between an addiction and a casual behavior.

According to substance abuse experts Chris and Pax Prentiss, founders of Passages Malibu, a residential drug rehab, addiction is caused by underlying problems in a person's life that they are unable to cope with. When someone is unable to cope with their circumstances they sometimes turn towards drugs and alcohol for relief. In essence it is not the drugs that are the problem it is rather the underlying problems that need to be addressed and healed in order to cure the addiction. When the underlying problems are no longer present the person will no longer need the drug.

People who don't have the individual therapy it takes to become healed will most likely continue taking the drugs.

Tolerance. When you take a habit-forming substance regularly, your body eventually accommodates the substance. You don't get the same feeling you originally got, or at least not the same strength of feeling. This does not mean that you are getting stronger and can handle the drug. Instead, your body is becoming dependent on the drug. Some people addicted to certain drugs may even die if they stop taking the drug suddenly.

Withdrawal symptoms. Different addictions have different withdrawal symptoms. The list of possible withdrawal symptoms is very long, stretching from watery eyes to delirium and even death, depending on the substance, the length of the addiction, and the user.

In short, if you're not sure if you're addicted your best bet may be to ask yourself these three questions:

Do I get the same experience from the substance I got when I first started on it?

When I stop taking the substance on a regular basis, do I feel worse, emotionally or physically?

Is there anything in my life that is causing me pain that I might be self medicating?

If you can answer yes to any of those questions, you are probably addicted.

So, you're addicted. Now what?

Abstinence and the Risk of Relapse

According to Chris and Pax Prentiss, one of the biggest misconceptions about addictions is that they're a disease. Through years of research they have figured out that addiction is definitely caused by underlying problems in a person's life that they are self-medicating. The addiction will usually continue if the underlying problems are still present. In order to get sober and stay sober it is of utmost importance that the underlying problems be treated.

Every day, addicts everywhere decide to stop. That is, they abstain. But unfortunately, most of those

people will relapse. Why is relapse so common? The Prentisses have a few insights:

Habit. Without realizing, you worked your addiction into the everyday rituals of life.

Dependence. The physical and emotional withdrawal symptoms can be brutal. In some cases of addiction, simply abstaining from a substance suddenly, without medical supervision, may cause the individual serious harm, even death. Yet many addicts who abstain are able to get past the withdrawal symptoms—and still end up relapsing. Why?

Underlying causes. Addictions usually have an underlying cause. There was a reason you took the substance in the first place. Once you are done fighting withdrawal symptoms, you will be back fighting whatever problem led you to addiction in the first place. Finding the underlying cause of your addiction will be the most important step in ending it forever.

Ultimately, then, the hardest part of overcoming an addiction may not be stopping, but not starting again. To do that, you need to find and resolve the underlying problems in your life.

Residential Rehab: Do You Need It?

According to the Prentisses, some people can get over an addiction without a residential drug rehab. But given the challenges of overcoming an addiction, the support of a residential rehab program is invaluable. Have you tried to end your addiction without residential rehab? It might be what makes the difference this time.

Why Do So Many People Fail after Residential Rehab?

You've heard of all the people who went to residential rehab and then relapsed—even went and relapsed several times. According to Chris and Pax Prentiss, there are some common causes of residential rehab failure, causes you can avoid.

Quality of the program. If your rehab program wasn't great to begin with, you won't be in good stead to avoid relapse. Before signing up, find out the success rates of past participants.

Group rather than individualized therapy. Post-rehab relapse is so common largely because most rehabs don't have offer any individual counseling. When someone sits in group meetings all day they don't get the therapy they need in order to get better. When they check out of a rehab like that they usually still have the underlying problems that they checked in with.

Lack of aftercare services. When you leave residential rehab, the whole web of support that kept you out of addiction suddenly falls away. Only choose a residential rehab that provides aftercare support to make the transition easier.

Need to change everything. Without realizing it, you wove your addiction into the fabric of your life. You need to pluck the threads of addiction out of your life, or reweave the fabric completely. If you can't transform your everyday life, you will likely relapse.

Regardless of the difficulties present in the rehab process, the experience can absolutely be a success unlike any other. Please consider the rehab option if you think you or your loved one may be in need. There is always someone there to help.

Abhilash Patel wrote this article with Chris and Pax Prentiss, founders of Passages Malibu, a California drug rehab, which also has an alcohol and drug rehab program offering:



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