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Somethin' Got a Hold on You?

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Addictions start innocently enough for the most part, as we turn to an occasional cigarette, cocktail, sleeping pill or even shopping spree to help us relax, unwind and enjoy life a little more. No one would confuse these activities for a compulsive behavior or addiction—at least not until the psychological, emotional or physical need for one of them starts to interfere and take control of our lives. Then whoa, we've got a problem! For many people, addiction seems like such a strong word; they prefer "dependency." But the two aren't the same, says Scott Sandland, C.Ht., a Southern California–based medical hypnotherapist. Dependencies are purely physical; addictions also have an emotional or psychological component, he says. If you have acute, debilitating pain, you depend on pharmaceuticals to dull it. When your pain goes away, you no longer need the drug. But dependencies can turn into full-blown addictions if you continue a behavior despite the harm that doing so inflicts. Addiction specialists Todd Ritchey and John Montgomery, Ph.D., coauthors of *The Answer Model: A New Path to Healing* (TAM Publishing), say that "whenever we compulsively behave in ways that are destructive to ourselves and to others, we do so out of addiction." The following options may help get your life back on track whether you're just concerned or you already have a problem. Of course, if you feel your situation is spiraling out of control, seek professional help; these remedies are primarily intended to enhance conventional treatments, such as 12-step programs (12step.org) or psychotherapy, not replace them.

Your problem ALCOHOL

Address nutritional deficiencies Chronic alcohol use appears to prevent the body from properly absorbing nutrients, and being deficient in vitamin B and magnesium can cause "DTs" (delirium tremens) and cardiac arrhythmias, making detoxification from alcohol more difficult, says Thom Lobe, M.D., director of the Beneveda Medical Center, an energy medicine practice in Beverly Hills, Calif. TRY: Twin Lab's Super B-Complex (\$24 for 8 ounces, vitaminshoppe.com); Natural Vitality's Natural Calm magnesium supplement (\$22 for 8 ounces, vitaminshoppe.com)

Relieve depression naturally Excessive alcohol use often masks depression; omega-3 fatty acids may help ease it.

Lay off the sugar Keeping blood-sugar levels steady by eating a diet that's high in complex carbohydrates (such as vegetables) and low in simple carbs (such as white bread and sweets) as well as eating a little protein every few hours will help curb sugar cravings, a frequent problem for people who are giving up alcohol. The amino acid L-glutamine, which helps regulate blood sugar, has effectively been used to treat alcohol addiction.

Your problem SMOKING

Breathe like a yogi Ask most smokers why they light up and they're apt to reply, "Smoking calms me down," says Allison Kitchen, L.Ac., lead acupuncturist for the smoking cessation program at the Nova Medical Group & Urgent Care Center Inc., in Ashburn, Va. Curious, because nicotine is actually a stimulant. But think about the ritual of smoking: You remove yourself from whatever you're doing—many times a day—and for several minutes you take long, slow, deep breaths. The problem? You're having your mini-meditation break with "a lethal stick in your mouth," Kitchen says. The solution? Take five without the cigarette—using yoga breathing techniques. Breathe in deeply through your nose, pause for one second, then exhale slowly and completely. Pause at the end of the exhalation for a count of four. Repeat six to 10 times before breathing normally again.

Choose foods carefully According to a 2007 Duke University study, certain foods and beverages—milk, fruit, vegetables, water and juice—make cigarettes taste worse, while alcohol and, to a lesser extent, meat and caffeinated drinks, enhance their flavor.

Try homeopathy These remedies are recommended by certified homeopath Kathy Thorpe of Boulder, Colo.: Tabacum helps rid the body of tobacco residue and detoxify the effects of tobacco and nicotine. Take 30c twice a day for the first five days of your smoking detox. Lobelia inflata creates a strong aversion to tobacco. Take three pellets of 6c lobelia at each craving until the urges subside. Nux vomica can help relieve the irritability, headache, "toxicity" and constipation that sometimes accompany efforts to quit smoking. Take 30c once or twice a day for five days. TRY: Boiron Quit Smoking Care Kit contains nux vomica and lobelia inflata (\$14; amazon.com); Hyland's Homeopathic Tabacum (\$8 at retail stores); Boericke & Tafel's Antimonium tartaricum 30X (\$5 at retail stores)

Your problem RECREATIONAL DRUGS

Follow your nose Many essential oils have sedative properties, while others can lift and energize, says aromatherapist Brigitte Mars, author of *Addiction-Free: Naturally* (Inner Traditions International). Use only pure (not synthetic) oils, choose scents you love and switch oils from time to time. Put a few drops of the oil on a cotton ball and inhale deeply. Mars suggests the following: Rose oil (*Rosa damascena*, *R. gallica*) inspires confidence and lifts depression. It's useful during a crisis, such as alcohol or drug withdrawal. Clary sage (*Salvia sclarea*) helps relieve panic, paranoia and mental fatigue. A good choice for overcoming cravings for barbiturates ("downers") and marijuana. Bergamot (*Citrus bergamia*) helps relieve anxiety, depression and compulsive behavior. Use it to counter addiction to cocaine or other stimulants. TRY: Aura Cacia Aromatherapy oils (auracacia.com or in stores like Whole Foods Market)

Undergo acupuncture often The National Acupuncture Detoxification Association's wellstudied protocol uses specific auricular (ear) points to treat drug withdrawal. According to Steve Given, DAOM, L.Ac., of Bastyr University in Seattle, drugs suppress the body's own ability to produce endorphins, which are pain-reducing neurotransmitters. "Acupuncture has been shown to induce the release of endorphins and other neurotransmitters," he says. It calms the nervous system and reduces withdrawal symptoms, cravings and drug-related dreaming. Its effects are cumulative, so consider daily sessions at first.

Take an amino acid supplement A neurotransmitter deficiency can trigger specific cravings; amino acid supplements can be effective treatments. "We've been using them to treat addiction since the '80s because they work," says Julia Ross, M.A., executive director of The Recovery Systems Clinic in Mill Valley, Calif., and author of *The Mood Cure* (Viking Adult). A serotonin deficiency (which can cause cravings for alcohol and marijuana) can be treated with L-tryptophan; L-tyrosine can lessen cravings for stimulants like cocaine; a gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) deficiency can cause addiction to benzodiazepines (such as Xanax or Valium)

and is treatable with a GABA supplement; and L-glutamine, which helps regulate blood sugar, is effective in cases of alcohol and barbiturate addiction, Ross says. "Don't take a supplement that mixes amino acids in one formula," she cautions; if you have multiple addictions, you can take separate supplements. TRY: Source Naturals amino acids: L-Tryptophan (\$12 for 30 capsules), L-Glutamine (\$7 for 50 capsules); L-Tyrosine (\$7 for 50 capsules); GABA (\$13 for 45 capsules; sourcenaturals.com)

Your problem PHARMACEUTICAL DRUGS

Get more sleep People often turn to prescription drugs, such as OxyContin, Vicodin or Xanax, because they have a lot of pain or anxiety. But withdrawing from these drugs actually intensifies those feelings, says Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., medical director for the national Fibromyalgia and Fatigue Centers. Sleep can help relieve the pain and the anxiety. If you can't sleep, the calming herbs valerian, passionflower, wild lettuce, Jamaican dogwood and hops may help. TRY: Fatigued to Fantastic! Revitalizing Sleep Formula by Enzymatic Therapy (\$15 for 30 vegetable capsules; enzymatictherapy.com)

Start exercising Strengthening practices with a mindful component, such as karate, can bolster your body's ability to calm itself without replacing one addiction (pills) with another (exercise). Gentler types of exercise like qigong and yoga also can help.

Try hypnotherapy The subconscious mind is always moving you from pain toward pleasure, says hypnotherapist Debra Berndt, author of *Let Love In* (Wiley & Sons). If it senses that kicking a drug habit will cause discomfort, your subconscious will steer you toward that addiction, not away from it. Hypnosis can "rewire" this subconscious pattern by using the powers of suggestion and visualization, Berndt says. Commit to 20 sessions (in 20 days, if possible) for the best results. To find a medical hypnotherapist in your area, go to hypnosisleague.com.

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