

Drug commonly used for alcoholism curbs urges of pathological gamblers

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A drug commonly used to treat alcohol addiction has a similar effect on pathological gamblers – it curbs the urge to gamble and participate in gambling-related behavior, according to a new research at the University of Minnesota.

Seventy-seven people participated in the double-blind, placebo controlled study. Fifty-eight men and women took 50, 100, or 150 milligrams of naltrexone every day for 18 weeks. Forty percent of the 49 participants who took the drug and completed the study, quit gambling for at least one month. Their urge to gamble also significantly dropped in intensity and frequency. The other 19 participants took a placebo. But, only 10.5 percent of those who took the placebo were able to abstain from gambling. Study participants were aged 18 to 75 and reported gambling for 6 to 32 hours each week.

Dosage did not have an impact on the results, naltrexone was generally well tolerated, and men and women reported similar results.

"This is good news for people who have a gambling problem," said Jon Grant, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., a University of Minnesota associate professor of psychiatry and principal investigator of the study. "This is the first time people have a proven medication that can help them get their behavior under control."

The research is published in the June issue of the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*.

Compulsive gamblers are unable to control their behavior, and the habit often becomes a detriment in their lives, Grant said. He estimates between 1 to 3 percent of the population has a gambling problem.

While the drug is not a cure for gambling, Grant said it offers hope to many who are suffering from addiction. He also said the drug would most likely work best in combination with individual therapy.

"Medication can be helpful, but people with gambling addiction often have multiple other issues that should be addressed through therapy," he said.

Naltrexone is sold under the brand names Revia and Depade. An extended-release formulation is sold under the name Vivitrol.

Source: University of Minnesota

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