

Meds can help recovering meth addicts stay sober

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(Medical Xpress) -- A drug shown to help break alcohol addiction can also help recovering methamphetamine addicts stay clean, a study led by University of Virginia School of Medicine researcher Dr. Bankole A. Johnson has found.

The [randomized trial](#), conducted at U.Va. and seven other sites around the country, evaluated 140 [methamphetamine](#) addicts to determine the effectiveness of the drug topiramate in treating their addiction.

[Participants](#) were given either topiramate or a [placebo](#). The study found that while topiramate does not eliminate meth addiction, it can reduce the amount of meth taken and reduce [relapse rates](#) in those who have quit.

"Once a person stops, even for a few days, topiramate significantly increases their chances for not relapsing," Johnson, the study's principal investigator, said. "That's very important, because relapse prevention is an important component of addiction medicine. We try to get people drug-free, and then we want to give them something to take away with them to maintain that drug-free status. So this is one way in which that can be done."

Johnson, a pioneer in addiction research, first explored the theory that medications could treat addictions more than two decades ago. That idea, met with skepticism at first, has since transformed how many scientists think about addiction's relationship with the workings of the brain.

In a previous clinical trial, Johnson and his team successfully treated alcoholism by using topiramate to block the brain's dopamine pathways. The study found that the drug not only reduced heavy drinking, but diminished the physical and psychosocial harm caused by alcoholism.

"Our goal is to try and develop medicines to treat addiction," Johnson said. "We've had a lot of success with alcohol treatments, less so with stimulants. So this methamphetamine study is the first time we're beginning to find drugs that actually help."

Johnson's new findings on topiramate's effect on meth addiction are being published in the July issue of the journal *Addiction*. He plans to explore topiramate's effect on meth addiction further in a larger study.

Provided by University of Virginia

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