

Could targeting oxytocin help treat opioid addiction?

April 5 2017



Pills. Credit: Public Domain

A new review of published research indicates that the oxytocin system—a key player in social reward and stress regulation—is profoundly affected by opioid use. Therefore, it may be an important target for developing medications to treat opioid addiction and to prevent relapse.

"Social withdrawal is one of the key factors that can predispose people to heroin [addiction](#) but is also a consequence of drug use," said Dr. Alexis Bailey, senior author of the *British Journal of Pharmacology* review.

"Given the benefits that social support programs like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous have in keeping addicts abstinent, current findings in the review suggest the use of the prosocial hormone oxytocin as a novel effective 'psycho-biological therapy' for the prevention of relapse to drug-use in drug dependent individuals. Therefore clinical studies assessing the efficacy of oxytocin-based pharmacotherapies in [opioid](#) addiction are warranted."

More information: *British Journal of Pharmacology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/bph.13757](https://doi.org/10.1111/bph.13757)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Could targeting oxytocin help treat opioid addiction? (2017, April 5) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-oxytocin-opioid-addiction.html>

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