alcohol-related issues, including how to respond to peer pressure that encourages drunkeness, how to help a friend who drank too much, how males and females respond differently to alcohol, and how alcohol affects sexual activity. By providing an open forum for discussing alcohol use or abstinence and "the relative pros and cons of each choice," harmful drinking patterns decrease significantly. Dr. Marlatt says, "Harm reduction views people as responsible for their own choices. They are helped 'where they are' and moved from there in small manageable steps to increasing levels of improved self-care, health, safety, and well being.

Marlatt, G. Alan, PhD. Harm Reduction Works. www2.potsdam.edu/alcohol-info/ExpertOpinion/HarmReductionWorks.html

Natural Remedies for Depression

Basic Health Publications User's Guide to Natural Remedies for Depression by Linda Knittel, MA, offers a thoughtful introduction to depression and non-pharmaceutical treatments. Ms. Knittel reminds readers that mild to moderate depression is a symptom of many physical conditions including candida, hypothyroidism, hormonal imbalances, and childhood: "If left untreated, these conditions cannot only keep you depressed, but can also wreak havoc on your physical health." Deficiencies in vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids also cause depression.

In addition to addressing nutrition and underlying conditions, simple lifestyle changes, such as exercising regularly and getting enough sleep and relaxation, can help. Human interaction — either through friendships, group activities, or counseling sessions with a trained therapist — can be as helpful as an antidepressant. Ms. Knittel reports that a study, published in The Archives of General Psychiatry, found that 12 weeks of psychotherapy that focused on social relationships produced the same changes in brain function (according to PET brain scans) as 12 weeks of taking Paxil, in the clients who responded to either treatment.

User's Guide to Natural Remedies for Depression also introduces some helpful botanicals (St. John's wort and Kava) and amino acid derivatives (SAMe and 5-hydroxytryptophan). Research indicates that these substances have an antidepressant and/or anti-anxiety effect — although some, like St. John's wort and SAMe, may take 4-6 weeks to take effect. Melatonin deficiency or excess (as in the case of seasonal depression caused by lack of sunlight) can also affect mood. Melatonin supplementation or the use of high-intensity lighting, respectively, may help in these cases.


Prazosin for PTSD

War veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffer from recurrent combat-related nightmares that make a good night's sleep impossible. Although the drugs approved for PTSD mitigate daytime anxiety, none have an effect on these recurrent nightmares. When psychiatrist Murray Raskind became director of mental health services for the Veterans Administration Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle, Washington, he began searching for a solution for the nightmares that hampered his patients. Recognizing that night — when darkness hid approaching enemies — was particularly stressful for combatants, Dr. Raskind thought that his patients may have become conditioned to respond to any stimulus with an adrenaline rush that brought back their original trauma. He began looking for an adrenergic antagonist and came upon prazosin — a mildly-effective high blood pressure medication that had been on the market for over 30 years. Case reports and placebo-controlled studies show that prazosin eliminates sleep-disrupting nightmares in 4 out of 5 patients and restores normal dream function. The drug costs less than one cent for a day's treatment.

Downey, Roger. It's Just Too Cheap. Seattle Weekly 13 June 2002

Reward Deficiency Syndrome

A monograph by Kenneth Blum, PhD, Eric R. Braverman, MD, and colleagues explains Reward Deficiency Syndrome (RDS), a genetics-based condition that can make people vulnerable to addiction and impulsive/compulsive behaviors. The authors have found that people who lack dopamine D2 receptors (a condition linked to anomalies in the D2 dopamine receptor gene) are "more prone to seek any substance or behavior that stimulates the dopaminergic system as a form of self-healing." The dopaminergic and opioidergic reward pathways of the brain produce feelings of pleasure and well-being that reinforce the attainment of basic necessities for survival such as eating, love, and reproduction.

The 112-page monograph can be obtained from Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, phone 415-565-1904; fax 415-864-6162; e-mail Journal@hafci.org

Dietary Supplements & Antisocial Acts

A large study by C. Bernard Gesch and colleagues, published in the British Journal of Psychiatry (July 2002), found that dietary supplements reduced antisocial and violent incidences among prison inmates: 231 young adult prisoners were divided into two groups for this double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized experiment. The number of disciplinary incidents in the two groups was the same, and IQ, verbal ability, and levels of anger, anxiety, or depression had no significant differences. One group received dietary supplements containing vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids for an average of 142 days. The other group received a placebo.

The number of offenses in the supplemented group was reduced by 35.1% from the baseline rate, and the number of serious incidences (including violence) dropped 37%. When compared to the placebo group, prisoners taking the supplements committed an average of 26.3% fewer offenses. CRIME Times (Vol. 8, No.3, 2002) reports that this study "supports previous findings by Stephan Schoenthaler and colleagues, whose studies show that nutritional supplementation can reduce antisocial acts by incarcerated children or adults, as well as reducing antisocial behavior and increasing IQ in 'at risk' school children."


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