



Alternative Therapies for Addiction & How They Can Help:

Fitness, Art, Music and Biofeedback

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Introduction

Drug or alcohol addiction is a disease that changes the way your brain functions over time, causing intense cravings for drugs or alcohol that only more of that substance can seem to satisfy. Alteration of the brain's chemistry may be one of the first physical changes that result from addiction, but it is usually not the only one. Addiction can affect a person's long- and short-term health.

While traditional addiction treatment may utilize medications to reduce withdrawal symptoms and behavioral therapies to help you learn how to deal with cravings, an increasing number of rehabilitation facilities are also embracing alternative treatment therapies as a means to enhance recovery and help you emerge from rehabilitation with a new, healthier lifestyle.

Alternative therapies include exercise, art, music and biofeedback. While these are not a replacement for traditional addiction treatments, they can be a supplement that enhances your results. Several alternative therapy types are available.

This eBook will explore these options and the benefits each type offers to those looking to engage in stress-relieving measures as well as reduce anxiety, stress and tension associated with attempting to quit using drugs or alcohol.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's legs running on a treadmill. The person is wearing bright red sneakers with white soles and green accents. The treadmill is dark grey with white markings. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and pink flowers. The overall tone is bright and positive.

Benefits of Exercise in Recovery

Exercise benefits the body, and it has benefits in particular for people engaged in the recovery process. According to the *American Holistic Health Association*, benefits associated with exercise in rehabilitation include:

- Improved mood
- Enhanced self-esteem
- Better sleep
- Greater energy levels
- Heightened immunity¹



A study published by *Frontiers in Psychiatry* found that aerobic exercise and drug abuse have an inverse relationship—people who exercise regularly are less likely to abuse drugs and vice versa.² The study also found that exercise made those in recovery less likely to relapse. This is a more significant finding for females than males, however, both sexes can reap the benefits of exercise in relapse prevention. Those in recovery may have to start slowly when it comes to adding exercise to their daily routines.

Spending 30 minutes to an hour per day can establish a healthy habit for those in recovery. Examples of exercises that could be utilized in a rehabilitation setting include walking, running, riding a bicycle or weightlifting. These activities can help a person grow stronger and healthier, all while increasing the positive feelings that come from living a life free from drugs and alcohol.



Art and Music Therapy Promote Healing

A study published in the *Journal of Addiction Nursing* found that incorporating art and music therapy programs was associated with more positive results than programs that did not offer these therapies.³ Both art and music therapy encourage you to express yourself through creating art and experiencing music.

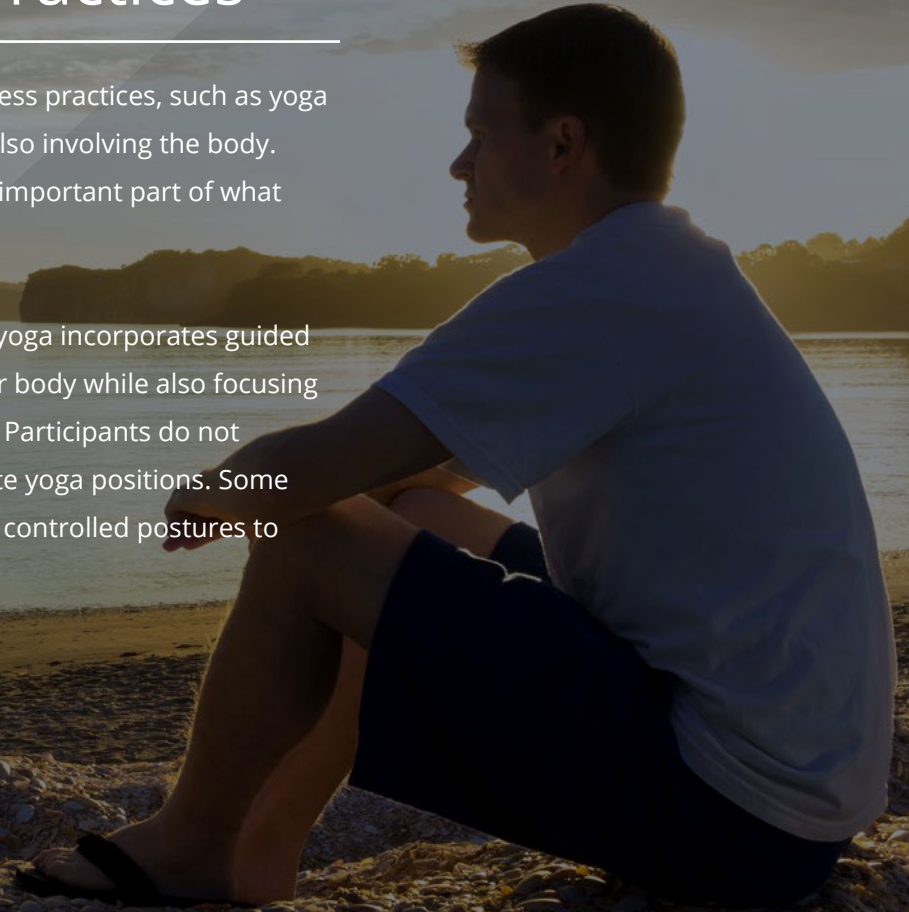
A person does not have to be a renowned artist or musician to reap the benefits of these therapies. Instead, you must simply engage in the material and focus on creating a work of art or enjoying a particular piece of music that makes you happy and relaxed.

The arts are strongly tied to emotion and emotional responses. Through art and music therapy, you are more likely to explore your emotions and express them through another outlet in addition to talk therapy.

Utilizing Mindfulness Practices

An offshoot of customary types of exercise are mindfulness practices, such as yoga and qigong. These practices emphasize the mind while also involving the body. Deep breathing and slow, controlled movements are an important part of what mindfulness practices have to offer.

There are several different types of yoga, but in general yoga incorporates guided stretching movements that can help you strengthen your body while also focusing on careful, deliberate breathing patterns and relaxation. Participants do not have to be as flexible as a gymnast to effectively complete yoga positions. Some rehabilitation programs utilize a series of modified slow, controlled postures to help you achieve feelings of peace and comfort.





According to the American Holistic Health Association, yoga can specifically help those in recovery by reducing the cravings, insomnia and agitation that can often occur when a person is attempting to detox from drugs or alcohol.⁴ Through learning to join body and mind by resting comfortably and mentally focusing on peaceful, positive thoughts, yoga practitioners can learn to better deal with stress and temptations that can occur when they return to regular life following a rehabilitation stay.

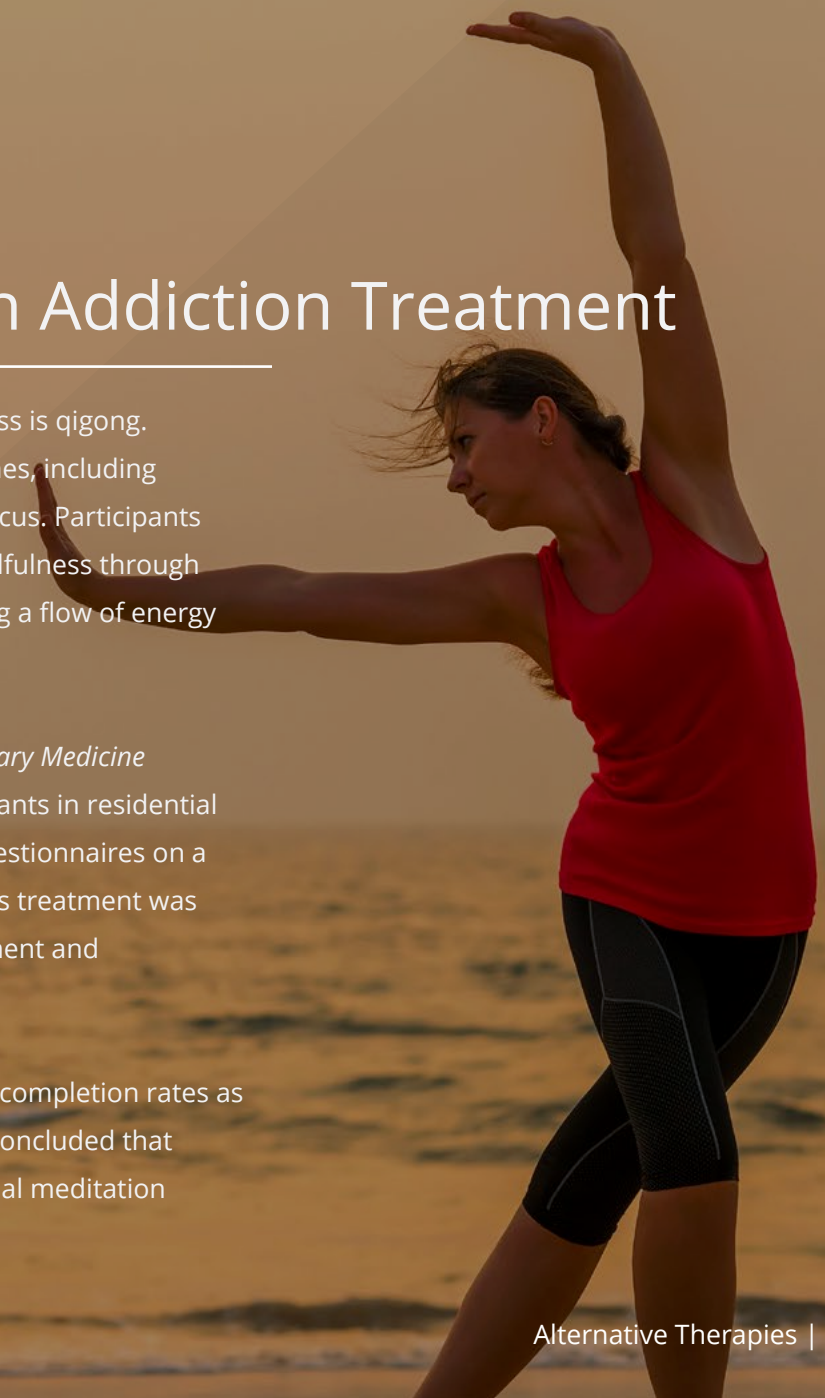
Yoga helps to reduce stress hormones in the body, such as adrenaline and cortisol. Additionally, yoga practice can help to increase the amount of GABA, a neurotransmitter associated with making you feel calm and relaxed.

Qigong Shows Promise in Addiction Treatment

Another alternative therapy option associated with mindfulness is qigong. This practice is a combination of several therapeutic approaches, including choreographed postures, breathing techniques and mental focus. Participants engage in slow, controlled movements while engaging in mindfulness through positive visualizations and guided imagery, including imagining a flow of energy through the body that promotes healing.

A study published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* incorporated qigong sessions into the daily routine of participants in residential addiction treatment.⁵ Participants were asked to complete questionnaires on a weekly basis to determine if the therapy was effective, and this treatment was then compared with another program, called Stress Management and Relaxation Training.

Participants in the qigong group experienced higher program completion rates as well as a greater reduction in drug cravings. The researchers concluded that qigong programs provided equally positive results as traditional meditation therapies offered.



Acupuncture: An Ancient Therapy to Restore Energy

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese medicinal practice of applying small, thin needles to specific areas on a person's body to restore balance. While acupuncture is traditionally used to treat chronic pain, it has other applications, including in the addiction recovery field. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, acupuncturists have used the techniques since the 1970s to help people quit smoking.⁶

The Yale School of Medicine published an article on the specific use of auricular treatment—ear acupuncture—for individuals in recovery.⁷ Acupuncture sessions can last anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. Once the needles are applied, clients are often encouraged to drift off to a peaceful sleep.

The acupuncturist stimulated five specific points intended to relieve anxiety and help those struggling with addiction to relax:

- **Autonomic Point:** Promotes relaxation and slows the nervous system.
- **Shen Men:** Also known as the “spirit gate,” stimulating it helps to reduce feelings of anxiety and nervousness.
- **Kidney Point:** Calms fears and heals internal organs.
- **Liver Point:** Helps to achieve detoxification, purify the blood and reduce anger.
- **Lung Point:** Reduces grief.



According to a study published in *Evidence-Based Complementary Alternative Medicine*, some animal-based studies have concluded that acupuncture has benefits in reducing withdrawal symptoms associated with alcohol abuse⁸. While more research should be conducted, there is some evidence that acupuncture increases the amount of dopamine levels in the brain.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. This release of dopamine

has also been shown to aid people withdrawing from opioid addictions. Although many of the benefits of acupuncture are often anecdotal, it is important to consider the risks associated with the treatments as well.

It is important that a person must see an experienced practitioner who uses sterile needles and is well-versed in the proper delivery of such treatments. While reported side effects are rare, they can include infections and central nervous system injury.

Biofeedback: Using the Brain to Improve Body Processes

Stress, anxiety, tension and anger can all produce physiological changes in the body. The practice of biofeedback aims to help a person gain better control of their own brainwaves. A particular kind of biofeedback known as neurofeedback aims to help people develop a more “normal” pattern of brain waves through self-regulation.

During a neurofeedback session, a person is connected to an electroencephalogram (EEG) machine via electrodes that are painlessly placed on the head, and a monitor displays ongoing changes in brain waves. The participant is then encouraged to picture several scenarios where she has successfully overcome a drug or alcohol addiction. According to the *American Holistic Health Association*, this has the effect of reducing the likelihood of drug relapse.⁴



A study published in *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* found that patients who participated in EEG biofeedback experience a longer period of drug or alcohol abstinence than those who did not.⁹ During the study, more than 100 volunteers participated in a biofeedback regimen or a control group.

After 12 months, an estimated 70 percent of those in the biofeedback group were still sober as compared to 44 percent for the control group that did not receive the biofeedback treatments. According to the study,

biofeedback was shown to improve attention and thinking while also reducing impulsivity, which can contribute to a person's likelihood to relapse.

In addition to therapies using neurofeedback, there are also therapies that use other tools to help promote sobriety. These include measuring a person's breathing rate, blood pressure and muscle tension while a therapist explains deep-breathing exercises as well as visualization exercises. By utilizing these approaches, people are able to learn to control and moderate their physical responses to stress and anxiety.



Nutrition Therapy After Addiction

Substance abuse can affect a person's metabolism and often results in nutritional imbalances. The withdrawal process from drugs or alcohol can also result in stomach symptoms, such as diarrhea, vomiting and nausea that can affect a person's overall nutrition.

Nutritional deficiencies can include electrolyte imbalances as well as an overall lack of energy due to insufficient calorie intake.¹⁰ People who abuse alcohol are particularly affected by nutritional imbalances, such as deficiencies in vitamin B6, thiamine and folic acid.

The results are medical conditions such as anemia and Korsakoff syndrome, which is the result of a thiamine deficiency. In an attempt to correct these nutritional deficiencies, people in recovery can benefit from nutritional counseling by a dietitian or other nutrition professional.

Nutritional advice may include:

- Eat at regular mealtimes to develop a healthy eating routine.
- Choose foods that are higher in dietary fiber, such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains, to reduce symptoms and increase intake of vitamins and minerals.
- Reduce caffeine intake whenever possible, which can decrease anxiety and feelings of nervousness.
- Incorporate lean proteins and complex carbohydrates into your diet.



In addition to adopting healthier eating habits, a person can also benefit from increasing his or her fluid intake and making an effort to drink more water. A dietitian can also advise a person in the nutrients he may be missing and recommend supplements associated with these deficiencies. For instance, a person experiencing alcohol abuse problems can benefit from B-complex vitamins as well as thiamine.

According to a study published in *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, there is a close relationship between drug use and poor nutrition.¹¹ By learning about healthy eating and making dietary changes that are nutritionally beneficial, a person may be able to reduce the withdrawal symptoms associated with abusing drugs or alcohol. According to the study, a well-nourished brain that is supplied with all of the nutrients it needs is associated with higher rates of long-term recovery.

Hypnosis: A Means to Promote Relaxation

Hypnosis is another technique that addiction rehabilitation facilities may employ in helping you to find ways to reduce cravings and promote relaxation. A hypnotherapist can assist in using hypnosis during recovery. A therapist who specializes in addiction treatment may use hypnosis to instill the belief that a person does have the power to overcome a drug or alcohol addiction.

Steps a hypnotherapist may take during a session include the following:

- Asking a client to rest quietly and imagine their future self living a life of sobriety.
- Asking a client what they see or hear. Examples could include a person seeing themselves with more energy, a steady job and a stable home life.
- Building on these positive thoughts by encouraging a person to see themselves as a strong individual who can overcome drug or alcohol addiction.

Exploring Alternative Therapies for Addiction

Just as traditional addiction treatment therapy is not a one-size-fits-all approach, neither are alternative addiction therapies. You may need to try one or more different therapies for a period of time to determine what treatments you respond to.

These treatments can be used in coordination with traditional treatments, such as 12-step programs and medications for detoxification. When creating a treatment plan for you, rehabilitation professionals will work closely with you to determine what approaches and alternative therapies may work best for your particular situation.



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Treating Addiction at its Core

Therapy should treat more than just your symptoms. Addiction is a deeply rooted disease—one that can't simply be removed—and the emotions, history, and attitudes behind your behaviors need to be resolved in order to heal your mind and body.

Balance creates strength. It is vital that your treatment includes various methodologies to create a solid foundation on which to build your recovery. Our fluid, individualized process completely focuses on your growth and leads you to long-lasting recovery.

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