

Nutrition Builds Path To Recovery From Addictions

by Kathleen Finn

CHANCES ARE IF YOU'VE WORKED to kick an addiction to alcohol, drugs or food, you've addressed emotional or spiritual issues by joining a 12-step program or seeing a psychologist or counselor. However, Julia Ross, M.A., executive director of Recovery Systems in Mill Valley, Calif., believes a physical aspect of recovery, namely nutritional therapy, is a long-ignored healing modality for helping addicts and eating-disorder patients.

Her outpatient program focuses recovery on physical results of addiction. Ross maintains rebalancing brain chemistry, eliminating allergy-producing foods and supplementing the diet can lead addicts back to health.

"In the early '80s people realized the entire addiction treatment industry was failing," Ross says. "The patient relapse rate was high and getting worse. By 1985 it was clear the crack epidemic had hit hard in parts of the country, with relapse rates at almost 100 percent. It became obvious to those of us in the recovery field that we were missing a huge piece of the problem."

Nutritional therapy seems to be part of the solution. "We learned how to rebalance people's brain chemistry quickly and effectively," says Ross. "The key is using amino acids because they're the specific fuels used to create natural 'feel good' chemicals in the body."

These 'feel good' chemicals have different functions. Endorphines are the body's natural heroin. Norepinephrine is the body's natural speed, gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) is its natural sedative and serotonin has many jobs, Ross explains. "Serotonin allows us to sleep restfully, boosts feelings of self-esteem, buoys us in the face of difficulty, prevents aberrant cravings for sugar, or other refined carbohydrates and alcohol, keeps us from getting depressed at night or during winter, and prevents agitated depression and worry."

A lack of vital amino acids, due to excessive drinking (alcoholics) or starvation (anorectics), malnourishes the brain, and the body has nothing to make it feel good. "Using amino acid therapy, we predict and target clients' deficiencies. We know what their deficiencies are by what drugs they were using and by what symptoms they present," Ross says. "When you start using alcohol, drugs or a 'drug food' such as sugar, it's usually because there's something wrong to begin with. There could be

a genetic deficiency in your brain chemistry. You may legitimately try to balance it. Yet, while you're on alcohol or drugs, you make the problem worse," she adds.

With amino acid therapy, the brain uses these nutrients to quickly restore normal brain neurotransmitter levels and raise them higher than before the clients ever abused alcohol or drugs. People routinely tell Ross they never felt this good.

Amino acid therapy is one element of the program that includes a diet plan and supplements.

Amino Acids To Help Combat Addictions

Alcoholics, anorectics and bulimics who are nutritionally depleted often have severe deficiencies of important brain neurotransmitters that govern mood and emotion. Amino acid supplementation is part of Recovery System's dietary approach to rebalancing patients' brain chemistries while recovering. Withdrawal from addictive substances should be supervised by a qualified health expert.

Source: Natural Neuro Nutrition, Seabrook, Texas.

Brain Neurotransmitter	Function	Drugs That Affect Neurotransmitter	Neurotransmitter Deficiencies Result In	Amino Acid Supplement
Norepinephrine	Arousal, energy, drive	Cocaine, speed, caffeine, tobacco, marijuana, alcohol, sugar	Lack of drive, depression, lack of energy	L-tyrosine L-phenylalanine
GABA (gamma-amino-butyric acid)	Staying calm, relaxation	Valium, alcohol, marijuana, tobacco	Free-floating anxiety, fearfulness, insecurity, can't relax or sleep, unexplained panic	L-glutamine, GABA
Endorphins	Psychological and physical pain relief, pleasure, reward, good feelings toward others, loving feelings	Heroin, marijuana, alcohol, sugar, tobacco	Overly sensitive, feelings of incompleteness, anhedonia (inability to experience pleasure in a normal way), world looks colorless, inability to love	dL-phenylalanine
Serotonin	Emotional	Sugar, marijuana,	Depression,	L-tryptophan

	stability, pain tolerance, self- confidence	ecstasy, tobacco	obsession, worry, low self-esteem, sleep problems, sweet cravings, irritability	
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