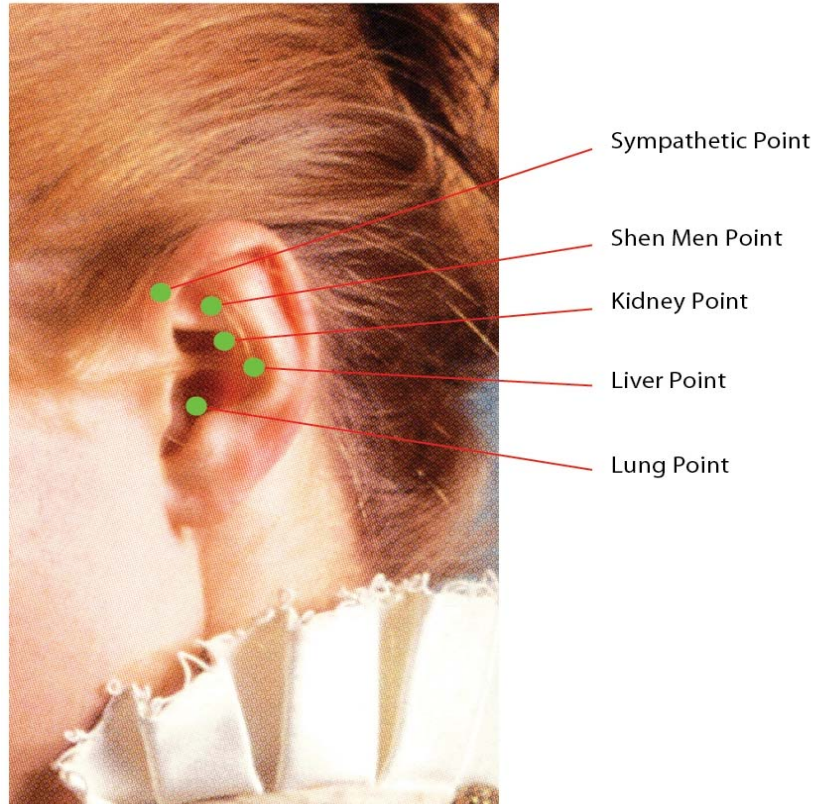


Treatment Topic of the Month **July 2008**

Recreational Drugs & HIV! **A Holistic Treatment Guide**



Disclaimer

The Treatment Resources Program at the Toronto People with AIDS Foundation provides information and resources to empower people living with HIV/AIDS to be proactive around their health by working in partnership with their health providers. We do not recommend or promote any treatment in particular. We strongly urge those interested in any specific treatment to consult a wide range of resources including a qualified medical and/or complementary therapy practitioner who has experience working with HIV+ patients.

For treatment information and resources,

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HIV & Recreational Drugs!

Do recreational drugs affect the immune system?

In general, the use of recreational drugs by HIV-positive people causes weakening of the immune system which in turn, increases the risk for HIV progression or other infections. Chronic drug use can reduce adherence to Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapy (HAART) which can increase the risk of developing drug resistance. In addition, if there are more drugs in the blood stream, there is an increased risk of interactions between recreational drugs and HAART. Both pharmaceutical and recreational drug use can lead to problems with your kidneys and liver as they are the organs responsible for processing and detoxifying drugs from your system.

It's also not clear whether drug use causes HIV to progress faster. We do know the following:

- Drug use may increase your chances of getting colds, flu, sore throats and other infections.
- Cocaine, crystal meth ('tina'), amphetamines (speed) and other drugs decrease your appetite, possibly leading to weight loss. This is worrisome for HIV-positive people as wasting can be a concern.
- Smoking crack can compromise treatment taken to prevent pneumonia.
- Alcohol weakens the effects of some antibiotics and antiviral drugs and may lead to oral candida (thrush).

Is it HIV or the drugs?

The symptoms of infections related to HIV can be mistaken for problems caused by drug use. This confusion can interfere with the early diagnosis of illnesses related to HIV. Try to be open with your doctor about your substance use so that you get the most accurate diagnosis possible. Drug interactions can manifest in several ways including competition for absorption, metabolism and elimination. The result can be an increase or decrease of the amounts of medications in your blood stream. Furthermore, the effects of drugs will depend on the strength, quality and purity of the drug; how the drug is taken (orally, smoked or injected); whether alcohol or other substances are used with that drug and if you sporadically or regularly use a particular drug.

What are the risks?

In an ideal world, the best choice would be to abstain from substance use especially if you are taking HAART. This is because there has not been enough research done about the possible interactions between recreational drugs and pharmaceutical drugs. Some immediate risks are dehydration, spending more time using/being high than you intend, and acquiring other diseases such as Hepatitis B or C. Some long-term risks can include physical or psychological dependency, weight loss or gain, financial issues and more acute illnesses such as sinus infections, cold and influenza. In the real world, substance use in some form is a reality for almost everybody. For these reasons, you can reduce the harm of using substances by preparing yourself before you party, taking smaller amounts of different substances (for example take 1/2 a tablet of Ecstasy so you can watch its effects on your mind and body).

Medications and Recreational Drugs:

Viral load and CD4 tests

Having drugs in your system may affect your viral load and CD4 test results. For the most accurate results, avoid taking drugs the weekend before your test. Most importantly, be consistent. If you stop using drugs a few days before one test, try doing the same for future tests. That way your results aren't affected by drug use.

Drug interactions

We know very little about the interactions between HIV medications and recreational drugs. But we do know that mixing the two can change the effects of many recreational drugs and reduce the effectiveness of HAART. For example, Protease Inhibitors, especially Ritonavir (Norvir), affect specific liver enzymes which can cause increased levels of recreational drugs in the body. Anti-fungal drugs such as ketoconazole and itraconazole also affect liver enzymes which can lead to drug interactions. It is also important to remember that people can react differently to the same drug depending on their sensitivity to the drug, their body size, the amount of drug taken and the presence of other drugs in the system. Many recreational drugs are now cut with other substances which in themselves can be very harmful to your health. For these reasons, it is difficult to gauge the purity or quality of street drugs, especially when you are not familiar with your dealer. Before starting any new treatment, ask your doctor about side effects and potential interactions with recreational drugs.

Crystal Meth & HIV

Crystal Methamphetamine (also known as Crystal, Meth or Tina) is a street drug that is used by many groups of people but especially among gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men (MSM). It is a stimulant or an "upper" that releases hormones serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine that impact your brain and nervous system. Some physical effects can include an increase in heart rate, decreased appetite and insomnia. Some long-term risks include weight loss, neurological issues, addiction, tooth decay, depression and loneliness. There are a variety of opinions about how crystal affects HIV-positive people. It seems that it may temporarily boost your immune system but it also boosts HIV production. The other problem is that even occasional crystal meth use can lead to skipping meals, vitamin depletion, profound weight loss and staying awake for several days at a time. Crystal meth use can also cause dehydration as well as mood swings and paranoia when high or coming off of the drug. There is also a possibility of interactions between HAART medications and amphetamines. Crystal Meth increases the amount of both Norvir and Kaletra in your system. It can also increase the amount of Viracept and Rescriptor in your system. Meth increases the risk of death or serious consequences by 2-3 times so it is a good idea to start with ¼ to ½ of a tablet. It is important to create a plan with your healthcare provider and friends to ensure you will be as safe as possible if you are going to use Crystal Meth.

For more information on party drugs, including crystal meth, check out the following websites;

www.torontovibe.com

www.tweaker.org

www.knowcrystal.org

www.tripproject.ca

An informative website about crystal meth

Another site about crystal meth

For youth involved in the party scene

Nutrition and Recreational Drugs:

Party Tips:

Get lots of rest: You'll be exerting your body physically by staying awake longer than normal, probably not eating so well, dancing all night and maybe having lots of sex! These physical strains can also impact your emotional and mental states. Lots of rest before and after will help your body prepare and repair.

Eat well... Before and after going out: All of this physical activity means you are using up energy. Food and healthy drinks are the best way to keep your body fueled up. Even if you don't feel hungry, it is important to eat well before and after partying. Some easy things to do are protein shakes, smoothies and fruit; and eating small amounts regularly if you don't feel like a proper meal. Another idea is to take vitamins and eat foods with lots of nutrients prior to partying because most drugs combined with long periods of physical exertion can impact your immune system.

Drink fluids: If you party for long periods of time, it is important to stay hydrated. Water is good, but sports drinks such as Gatorade are also important because they can help restore lost electrolytes (sodium/potassium balance). One way to check your level of hydration is to check how often you're peeing and the colour of your pee. If it's clear in colour then you're likely OK. If it's darker or more yellow then you should probably drink a bit more. If you are taking a multivitamin supplement that contains Niacin or B3, don't be alarmed as it tends to turn urine a bright yellow colour.

Accept your come down: When you start coming down it is tempting to keep the party going and fight off those feelings. The more drugs you do at one time, the harder your comedown will likely be. When chilling out, this is the time to bond with friends and partners, get some sleep and replenish your body with good food and fluids. Drug use can impact your brain chemistry which can result in feeling depressed for several days afterwards. These feelings should pass as your brain and body repair themselves. If you find the comedowns are too unpleasant, or are getting worse, or lasting longer, consider cutting back on your partying.

Keep condoms and lube with you. When you are high you may make different choices about the types of sex you want to have or who you'll do it with! You may not even be planning to get with someone but stay prepared just in case! Some drugs, such as Crystal Meth, can dry out your mucous membranes resulting in a greater chance of tears or abrasions from sexual intercourse. Make sure you use extra lube and change condoms more frequently when having sex for longer periods of time. This will decrease the chances of getting a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) such as the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Hepatitis C or Gonorrhoea. It is also important to remember that practicing safer sex will decrease the chances of acquiring a more drug resistant strain of HIV.

Keep a balanced life: Partying is fun but don't let it consume you. We need to work but we need to play too- getting out to party is great way to decrease stress, make new friends, or to hook up with someone for sex! But if partying is getting in the way of work, or you're loosing touch with friends and family, the come downs are rougher or longer, or maybe that bank balance isn't as healthy as it once was, think about cutting out the odd party.

Homeopathy and Recreational Drugs:

It is important to consult a qualified and trained Homeopathic Physician in the treatment of acute and chronic conditions. Please do not attempt to treat yourself.

Homeopathy is the second most popular form of medicine practiced worldwide. It is a naturally-based form of medicine that targets the underlying cause of disease by assisting the natural tendency of the body to heal itself. Homeopathy uses specially prepared remedies which are chosen based on the 'Law of Similars'. This philosophy states that a given substance will cure in a diseased person the same symptoms which it causes in a healthy person. Homeopathic medicine has a successful track record in treating both withdrawal symptoms and drug cravings. In most cases, there is not a specific remedy to deal with addiction. The following homeopathic remedies may be useful in the treatment of withdrawal symptoms;

Arsenicum Album: This remedy may be suitable for people who feel exhausted and extremely chilly. Even with this exhaustion, they may be so anxious that they feel like they have to move from place to place from restlessness. A person, who needs this remedy, may also be obsessive about small details and about their health; as well as have a fear to be alone.

Avena Sativa: This remedy is well-known for helping people suffering from chronic liver disease and early withdrawal symptoms. Symptoms that can indicate the use of this remedy include; affections of the brain and nervous system such as nervous exhaustion, insomnia, debility from chronic disease, impotence from too much alcohol, nervous tremors of the aged, chorea, paralysis/numbness of the limbs, and the inability to keep mind on each topic

Carbo Vegetabilis: This remedy can be useful for people who have withdrawal symptoms that include fatigue and faintness that are accompanied by gas, abdominal distension and belching. Such a person may feel weak and very cold, especially in the extremities, yet strangely enough may have a strong desire for fresh or moving air (such as from a fan). Carbo Vegetabilis can be helpful in regaining energy after long-term illness or health problems.

Coffea Cruda: This remedy comes from the coffee bean. If you think about the effects that coffee can have upon the human body, then, this remedy is useful in treating those symptoms of over activity of the mind, excitability and sleeplessness. Other symptoms can include a heightened sensitivity to noise or other distractions; neuralgic (nerve) pains; headaches. Many of these symptoms can be soothed by cold applications.

Nux Vomica: This remedy is well-known for its efficacy in treating overindulgence in rich foods, alcohol and recreational drugs. A person who needs this remedy is often nervous, irritable, impatient, easily offended and very sensitive to light, noise, touch and odours. Other possible indications are chilliness, cramps and digestive issues; as well as ineffective urging to either vomit or to have a bowel movement.

Quercus: This remedy comes from the English Oak tree. It is specifically used to diminish craving for alcohol. It can also be used for withdrawal symptoms for other addictions. Symptoms that indicate its use include being easily moved to tears, nervousness and melancholy; a vice-like sensation around the head; a gnawing sensation in the stomach and deafness or noises in the head.

Managing Recreational Drugs with TCM

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) was developed in China over 2000 years ago. TCM consists of acupuncture, herbal therapy and tuina (massage and manipulation involving acupressure). TCM is an energy therapy in which the body's life force (qi) controls the body's mechanisms of homeostasis, immunity and energy flow. Qi is connected through a series of networks called meridians. In this philosophy, health encompasses the whole body as well as the mind and emotions.

For more than 20 years, acupuncture has been used in North America to help people manage cravings for alcohol, nicotine and other addictive substances. In 2000, a clinical trial was conducted to test how effective acupuncture would be in helping patients with cocaine and heroin addiction. The participants who received the protocols for auricular (ear) acupuncture were much less likely to be using cocaine than participants in the other groups. More than half (54.8%) of the auricular group tested free of cocaine during the last week of treatment compared to only 23.5% of the 'sham' acupuncture group. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, 14/28, 2000, 2305-2312)

The NADA Protocol:

The National Acupuncture Drug Association (NADA) protocol has been shown to be effective in assisting with the emotional, psychological and physiological difficulties of overcoming addiction. This protocol uses five specific ear acupuncture points on each ear for addiction treatment. These points are;

Sympathetic point- It balances sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and has a strong analgesic quality.

Shenmen point- It is often called "Spirit Gate" because it has a calming and relaxing effect to help alleviate anxiety and nervousness that can accompany withdrawal.

Kidney Point- It tonifies source energy/essence that is often damaged through chemical abuse. It helps to resolve fear and increases the willpower needed to overcome addiction.

Liver Point- It promotes repair of the liver from drug and alcohol abuse and helps in resolving anger and aggression.

Lung Point- It strengthens the immune system and accelerates detoxification. Emotionally, it is associated with letting go.

Wellness Resource Guide

Health Promotion Services at PWA:

Contact Rebecca, Treatment Resources Coordinator for;

- Student Massage Clinic
- Holistic Treatment Counselling
- Community Naturopathic Clinic for People with HIV
- Harm Reduction

Contact Kevin, Programs Coordinator for;

- Volunteer Massage Program
- Reiki
- Therapeutic Touch

Contact Greg, Speakers Bureau Coordinator for;

- The Energy Healing Circle

Contact Llewellyn, Treatment Access Coordinator for;

- Trillium
- Compassion Access to Medications (H-MAP)

Treatment Websites:

CATIE

www.catie.ca

The Body

www.thebody.com

AIDSInfonet (New Mexico AIDS Project)

www.aidsinfonyet.org

AIDS Map

www.aidsmap.org

AIDS Treatment News

www.aidsnews.org

HIV/AIDS Medications

www.aidsmeds.com

Multilingual HIV Treatment Information

www.treathivglobally.ca

The Well Project (geared towards women)

www.thewellproject.org

Project Inform

www.projectinform.org

Nutrition:

Jon Kaiser [Immune Power: The Comprehensive Healing Program for HIV](#)

Jon Kaiser www.jonkaiser.com

Lark Lands www.larklands.net

CATIE [A Practical Guide to Nutrition for People Living with HIV](#)

Complementary Therapies:

CATIE

[Practical Guide to Complementary Therapies](#)

Complementary Therapists List

www.actoronto.org

Homeopathy

http://www.csoh.ca/Homeopathy_Introduction.htm

Traditional Chinese Medicine

www.docmisha.com

Nutrition Services:

www.stmichaelshospital.com/programs/nutrition

Community Naturopathic Clinic

416-324-4187 (to book an appointment)

Community Resources:

Toronto People With AIDS Foundation

www.pwatoronto.org

VOICES of Positive Women

www.vopw.org

Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention

www.black-cap.com

Asian Community AIDS Services

www.acas.org

Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention

www.asaap.ca