

Addressing Smoking and Other Addictions

Research supports smoking cessation during substance use treatment.

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Adults who smoke cigarettes and are addicted to alcohol or other drugs were more likely to achieve sustained remission of their substance use disorder symptoms if they also quit smoking, according to scientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Based on their analysis of data from a large U.S. study of smoking and health, researchers believe the results clearly show the benefit of pairing smoking cessation with addiction recovery efforts.

“We now have strong evidence from a national sample that quitting cigarette smoking predicts improved recovery from other substance use disorders,” explained Nora Volkow, MD, director of NIH’s National Institute on Drug Abuse, which partly funds the research, known as the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) Study. “It underscores the importance of addressing different addictions together, rather than in isolation.”

Participants in the PATH Study are asked annually about their smoking status and other substance use. In this analysis, a change in smoking status from “current” to “former” use of cigarettes was associated with 42% greater odds of the individual being in recovery from their non-tobacco substance use disorder.

People with addiction to alcohol or other substances have a higher likelihood of being addicted to nicotine as well. Previous research has suggested an association between smoking cessation and improved outcomes from other substance use disorders. However, the authors note that most prior studies used data from treatment centers focusing on addiction to a single substance or from smoking cessation trials, and those that used nationally representative samples could not adequately test for an association with recovery.

Researchers believe the new finding is generalizable to the millions of adults with substance use disorders and accounts for numerous confounding factors, thus increasing confidence in the results.

