Big Science Kicker

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Many an HIVer has struggled with cocaine addiction, and a new study offers pointed backing for one detox method used for decades: ear acupuncture. The eight-week, 82-person trial at Yale University (HIV status was not checked) found that patients on acupuncture were far more likely to stay cocaine free than those pricked at “sham” (placebo) acupuncture points or given relaxation training. Study participants got needled once a week, and also received group and individual therapy.

Despite hundreds of success stories from coke and crack addicts who had been tough to treat, previous studies found no benefit to needling. Yale’s Arthur Margolin, PhD, the new trial’s lead investigator, attributes his positive result to learning from others’ mistakes: He avoided needling at certain “sham” points that may have induced addiction-easing relaxation. “What our study adds is a positive finding under well-controlled conditions,” Margolin says. “Acupuncture does have promise.”

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