Treating Heavy Drinking

Monthly injections of extended-release naltrexone helps heavy drinkers with HIV cut back.

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HIV-positive heavy drinkers seeking to cut back on alcohol can benefit from monthly injections of extended-release naltrexone just as people without the virus can.

Researchers conducted a study with 51 people with HIV who drank heavily and who adhered to their antiretrovirals at a rate below 95 percent.

Among those who received at least five injections of naltrexone or the placebo, 23 were still in the study after 24 weeks and included in the analysis. All participants also received counseling.

Naltrexone did not affect the participants' adherence to their HIV treatment, the proportion with an undetectable viral load, their CD4 count or their VACS Index score, an estimate of the risk of death for people with HIV.

The treatment was, however, associated with fewer heavy drinking days among the participants.

"Currently, even when indicated, many patients do not receive medications that may help them cut down on their alcohol use," says Jennifer Edelman, MD, the first author of the study and an associate professor at the Yale School of Medicine. "We hope our findings result in more patients receiving injectable naltrexone."

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