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Oxygen Treatments Studied as a Tool for Sobriety



A Hyperbarics client dons an oxygen mask in the pressurized tank before receiving a treatment.

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Wednesday, May 19, 2021

STORY AND PHOTO BY KAREN BOSSICK

Can treatments of pure oxygen in high-pressure chambers speed the recovery of those dealing with severe substance abuse?

That's what a new study being conducted in Hailey is trying to determine.

The Hyperbaric Health and Wellness Foundation is working with Men's Second Chance Living transitional rehabilitation program on what is being called a ground breaking study.

"We're one of the first to study this," said Bas Verheijen, executive director of Hyperbaric Health and Wellness Foundation. "What we've seen so far is really promising. The oxygen treatments repair damaged cells, generate new blood vessels, decrease the swelling in infected areas and clear toxins in the system. And they appear to help people stop drinking immediately because it hurts to drink.

"If it does work, it could change the way professionals treat substance abuse patients and help get people back on track."


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The Breath of Hope Substance Abuse project is an interventional/observational study funded and sponsored by the Arlene and Michael Rosen Foundation. It will kick off with 10 participants. Each man or woman in the program will receive 20 Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatments and six months of intensive counseling.

Researchers are using a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment protocol named GAIN (Global Appraisal of Individual Needs), and they're testing memory, the ability to work math problems and other functions before and after. They're also monitoring drinking throughout the program. There will be a baseline quantitative computer test, a test assessing cognitive skills and a RightEye test testing brain-eye functionality.

Hyperbarics did a test study on one of Men's Second Chance Living residents, and it was "fairly successful" in helping the young man get off some of his medications, said Sonya Wilander, executive director of the program, which provides housing, counseling and other resources for eight men at a time.

"He said it helped clear his brain fog and helped him reduce his mental health medications. He's not completely off but he has been able to go off a lot," she said. "That prompted us to collaborate on writing a grant for this study. We'll use men from the house, as well as other people who are not involved with Men's Second Chance Living."

Wilander said her mission as executive director of Men's Second Chance Living is to get one resident at a time back to having a positive impact on the community.

"We thought it would be helpful because there's a lot of damage done from substances to the brain by alcohol and meth. If the oxygen treatments help the brain heal quicker, if they help participants want to remain sober, that could be beneficial in their sobriety. If your body is not healthy and your mind is not healthy, everything needs to change."

The Food and Drug Administration has approved hyperbaric oxygen therapy for 14 indications, including wound healing, carbon monoxide poisoning and decompression sickness. But not much research has been done on oxygen therapy's effect on substance abuse.

That said, Washington State University researchers have found that treatments of pure oxygen in high-pressure chambers can relieve the symptoms of opiate withdrawal, according to findings chronicled in the journal "Brain Research."

Morphine-addicted mice given pure pressurized oxygen before they began withdrawal had far less severe withdrawal symptoms and appeared much calmer than addicted mice that did not receive the treatment. Their jumps and tremors dropped by half and wet-dog shakes even more.

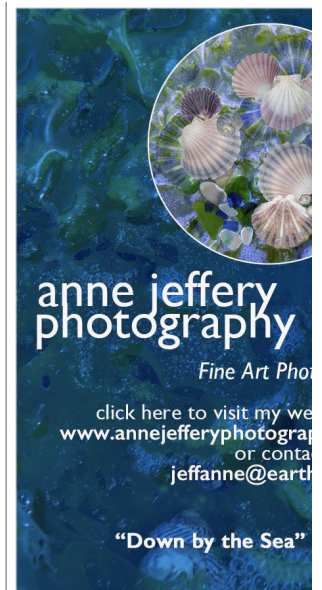
WSU Psychology Professor Ray Quock said the oxygen therapy also did not have the addictive qualities that many current therapies for treating heroin addiction do.

Some of the advantages of the Breath of Hope Substance Abuse project:

- Halve the symptoms of [opiate](#) withdrawal;
- Help repair damaged bodies – the treatment increases tissue regeneration and decreases swelling and inflammation by increasing oxygenated blood-flow to damaged tissue and generating new blood vessels;
- Help to clear toxins, which is important during drug and alcohol detoxification;
- Help improve decision-making and controlling emotions by improving quality and quantity of sleep;
- Increase stem cell production by 800%, these cells regenerate damaged tissues in the pancreas, liver and brain and other areas affected by alcohol and drug abuse.

"I think the study is very promising and, it's going to be interesting to see the men and women towards the end of the study when we interview them again," said Wilander. "If it proves helpful, it will be like a breakthrough for the residents of the sober house—and we want to do whatever we can do to help them be successful."

Questions? Contact bas@hyperbaricfoundation.com



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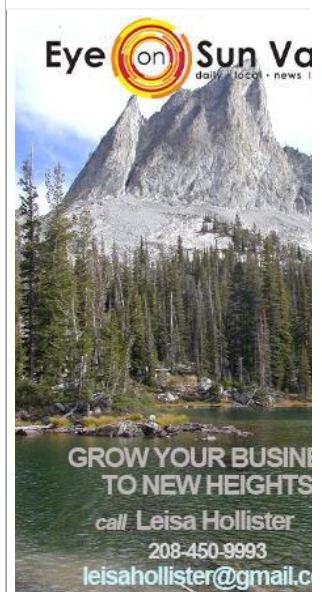


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