

Brain chemical linked to alcohol desire

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Australian scientists have identified a brain system that could not only blunt an alcoholic's craving for booze, but also the addiction.

The BBC reported Monday researchers at Melbourne's Howard Florey Institute discovered how to block the action of the brain's orexin system, which can also stop the desire for alcohol in its tracks.

Orexin cells, also known as hypocretins, are a pair of highly excitatory neuropeptides found in the brain. The chemical is involved in the "high" felt after drinking alcohol or taking illicit drugs or even eating a great meal.

Dr. Andrew Lawrence used a drug that actually blocked orexin's euphoric effects in the brain. Test rats, in fact, turned their noses up when faced with the opportunity of swilling unlimited alcohol, even those that had gone through detox chose to not imbibe.

"Orexin reinforces the euphoria felt when drinking alcohol, so if a drug can be developed to block the orexin system in humans, we should be able to stop an alcoholic's craving for alcohol," Lawrence told the BBC.

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