

# Beating heroin with 'willpower in a shot'

Jean Enersen and Pat Duggan, KING News

Published 1:06 a.m. ET Feb. 12, 2015 | Updated 11:28 a.m. ET Feb. 12, 2015

Jean Enersen reports.



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Ryan Davis looks like the college student he is now and not like the heroin addict he used to be.

"I would get myself clean for about a month or so and then just go right back to it again," he said.

Addiction specialist Dr. Stephen Markus of [Creekside Center for Integrative Medicine](#) sees it all the time.

"Young people notoriously will leave treatment, get picked up by their friends and be high by the end of the day," said Markus.

For Davis, heroin became a constant craving he couldn't control. The addiction took over his life.

"Heroin is something that will beat you down until you feel completely hopeless."

Families feel hopeless too. Davis' mother, Kelly describes it as the worst time in her life.

"It's really hard watching your child become somebody that you don't even know anymore," she said.

Then Davis heard about a once-a month injection called [Vivitrol](#) that blocks the effects of heroin. Dr. Markus said the drug has a distinct advantage over other opiate antagonists.

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"The nice thing about Vivitrol is that once you take a shot, that shot can't be removed

override it and get any reward."

Still Davis' mother wasn't convinced.

"I was very skeptical because I thought I'm not putting you on something that you're going to start using as a crutch," she said.

Or worse, like methadone treatment for heroin, she worried that her son would simply be trading one addiction for another. However, Vivitrol is not addictive. It's been likened to willpower in a shot.

"It really makes any kind of craving go away very quickly so it's really amazing," said Davis.

His mother still had doubts. She had seen him go down this path so many times before.

"You always have to be skeptical, because you never know when they're going to go off the deep end, but he never did, he just kept right on tracking and I'm just so proud of him," she said.

Dr. Markus has nothing but praise for Vivitrol.

"I think Vivitrol is the most amazing medication that's come on the market for opiate addiction." He said.

But this medication is still only a tool. Davis' mother knows that more than most,

"They have to make changes in their life because nothing is going to change for them until they do that. Vivitrol's a good tool but it's not the answer. It's just a part of their recovery," she said.

Vivitrol is not an entirely new drug. It's an injectable form of the drug naltrexone, but frees patients up to make a decision once a month instead of daily. Dr. Markus says it also gives parents the opportunity to give their offspring a longer leash, knowing they won't be tempted to slip up.

Drug treatment with Vivitrol takes a year and is combined with behavioral therapy. It is only FDA approved for patients 18 years of age and older.

Treatment averages about \$1,100 dollars a month, but Dr. Markus says that's bargain compared to the costs of repeat hospitalizations, legal fees and other expenses related to addictions. The drug company, Alkermes, Inc., does offer a discount program to eligible patients.