

Meditation might help alcoholics become aware of their urges and develop coping skills that may reduce their risk of going back to the bottle.

That's according to Dr. Aleksandra Zgierska, assistant professor of family medicine at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

She conducted a small study that showed meditation was as successful as conventional therapies in preventing alcohol relapse.

One meditation technique Zgierska uses is called "urge surfing."

"While meditating, one visualizes a craving or urge as an ocean wave that begins small and gradually builds to a large cresting wave," she explains. "Using the awareness of one's breath as a 'surfboard,' the goal is to 'surf the urge' by allowing it to first rise and then fall without being 'wiped out' by giving in to it."

Successfully 'surfing the urge' can weaken addictive conditioning and enhance healthy coping skills, she says.

Zgierska emphasizes that meditation would probably not be a replacement for standard therapy, but it's another option patients might find useful.