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Addiction is a Disease

Help is out there...



Addiction is defined, in Psychology Today, as a condition in which a person engages in use of a substance or in a behavior for which the rewarding effects provide a compelling incentive to repeatedly pursue the behavior despite detrimental consequences. It is a complex disease, often chronic in nature, which can cause serious damage to families, relationships, schools, workplaces and neighborhoods. **Some more common addictions that we hear of today are Illicit drugs, such as:**

*heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and various forms, thereof;
narcotic and opioid pain medications, such as oxycontin, oxycodone,
hydrocodone, dilaudid; alcohol; gambling; and over eating*



The most common symptoms of addiction are:

- Severe loss of control; the substance or activity is used in larger amounts or for a longer period of time than was intended.
- There is a craving or strong desire to use the substance or activity.
- Continued use despite serious consequences; preoccupation with using even when the substance or activity disrupts role obligations at work, school, or home and/or causes social or interpersonal problems.
- Participation in important social, work or recreational activities drops or stops.
- Failed attempts to quit.
- Tolerance occurs, indicated either by need for markedly increased amounts of the substance to achieve the desired effect or markedly diminished effect of the same amount of substance.
- Withdrawal occurs, manifest either in the presence of physiological withdrawal symptoms or the taking of a related substance to block them.
- Pursuit of the substance or activity or recovery from its use consumes a significant amount of time.

The severity of the addiction is gauged by the number of symptoms present. The presence of two or three symptoms generally indicates a mild condition; four to five symptoms indicate a moderate disorder; six or more indicates a severe addiction.

So what causes addiction? Is it genetic? Is it a learned behavior? There is no way to predict who will develop compulsive substance use or gambling behavior because it is a multi-faceted condition, arising from the confluence of many elements. Addiction can occur for several reasons:

- **Genes** - Estimates vary, but scientists find that genetic factors contribute about half the risk for developing a substance use disorder. Physiological factors; variations in liver enzymes that metabolize substances are known to influence risk of alcohol use disorder.
- **Gender** - Males are more likely to develop substance use disorder than females, although the numbers for alcohol use disorder in females is on the rise, as they are more subject to intoxication effects at lower doses of alcohol.
- **Personality Factors** - such as impulsivity and sensations seeking have been linked to substance use and gambling disorders, as well as contribute to risk of relapse.
- **Trauma and Abuse** - Early exposure to significant adverse experience can contribute to the development of substance use disorder by overwhelming the coping ability of an individual.
- **Mental Health Factors** - Conditions such as depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder increase the risk of addiction.
- **Family Factors** - Having a parent or sibling with an addictive disorder, lack of parental supervision or support, poor-quality or troubled parent-child relations, and family disruptions such as divorce, as well as sexual,

physical, or emotional abuse increase the risk for addiction.

- **Accessibility Factors** - Easy availability of alcohol or other substances in one's home, at school, or work, or in the community increases the risk of repeated use.
- **Peer Group/Pressure**

Treatment is available for substance addiction, as well as behavioral addictions such as gambling, eating, gaming, etc. Recovery, however, is often a long-term process that may involve multiple efforts, and relapse is now regarded as part of the process. Any improvements made during recovery are considered important signs of progress, and since addiction affects so many facets of an individual's functioning, good treatment focuses on many dimensions of life, including family roles, work skills, and mental health. Some key steps in recovery are:

- **Motivational Interviewing** - Short-term counseling process to help person resolve ambivalence about treatment and find incentives for change.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** - To recognize and cope with situations that trigger the desire to use substances or follow a certain behavior.
- **Group Therapy and Peer Support Programs** (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, etc.)
- **Family Therapy**
- **Life Skills Training**



Addiction is a disease, and it is, unfortunately, a continuous problem in the United States. Thankfully, treatment is available, but the person affected by this disease has to recognize that they have a problem and they have to WANT to recover. One can start by calling the National Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) hotline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This helpline is free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service for individuals and families. Addiction does not discriminate based on gender, race, economic class, type of employment, whether or not someone is single, married, divorced, etc. Addiction knows no boundary.

Email us topics or specific questions that you would like us to cover.

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The following websites were referenced for this article:

<https://www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/addiction>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>



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