

Breaking the Cycle of Substance Abuse



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Introduction

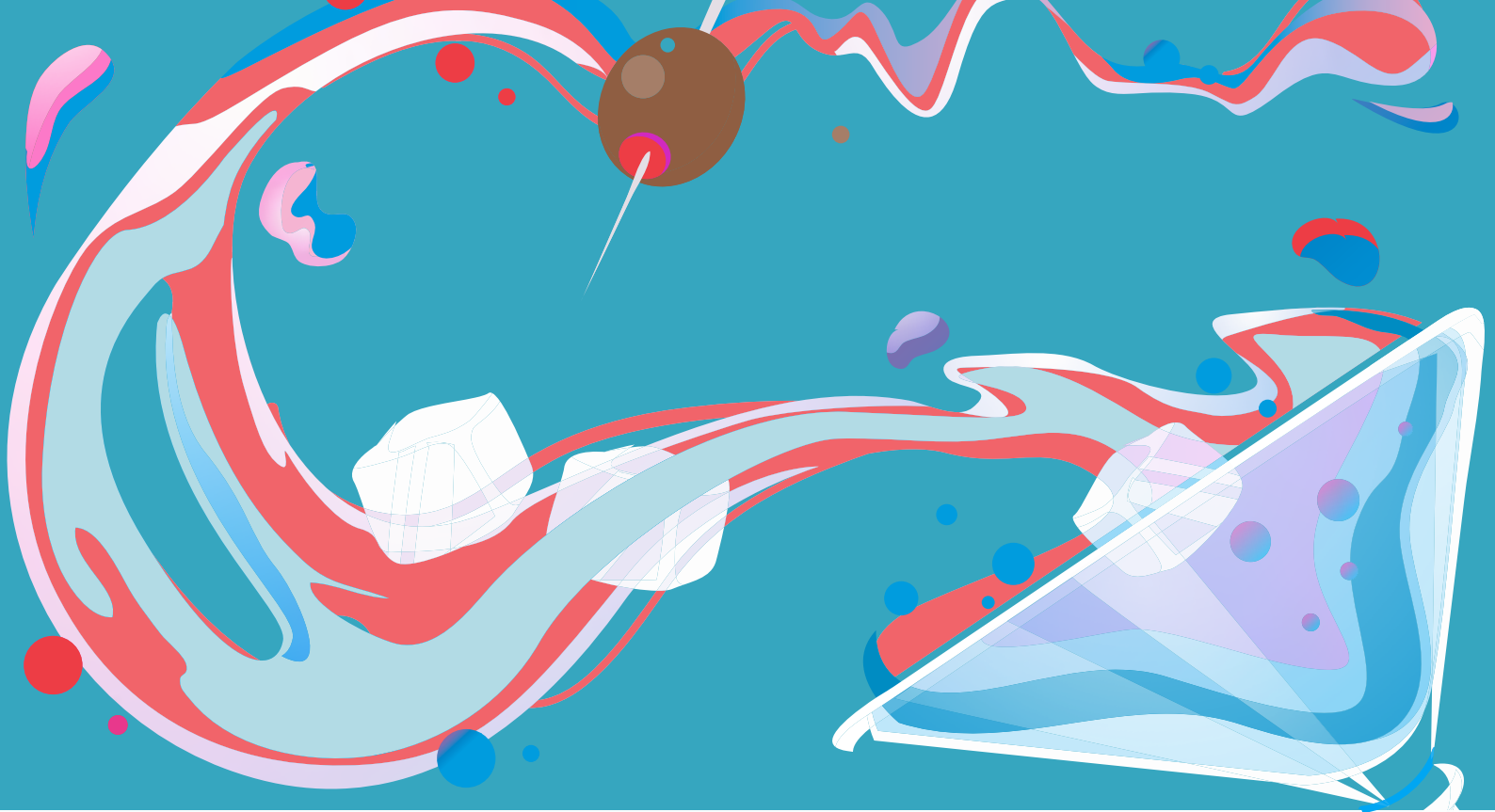
Recovering from addiction is one of the most difficult things one will ever do. Addiction is insidious, it's gripping, and it takes over one's life in the worst way, and what makes it even harder is that it is so deeply misunderstood by the people around us. How many times have we heard people say that addicts are weak, or that they are morally bankrupt? That addiction is a choice?

A thorough understanding of addiction is absolutely essential in order to be able to overcome it, or to be able to support a loved one in their journey to recovery. Addiction is a terrible disease that can destroy one's life, and in order to get healthy again, one needs help and support.

This book is meant to help those who are struggling with substance abuse addiction or the loved ones of addicts to understand this disease better, as well as gain knowledge and tools to be able to fight addiction. It's not an easy fight, and it's not a short one, but one can prevail, if they have help, love, support, and complete understanding.

From the first signs of addiction to steps towards recovery and even what to do in case of a relapse, this guide covers all the key points in the journey to recovery, addressing both addicts and loved ones alike.





CHAPTER 1

What Is Addiction and How Do You Recognize It?



What Is Addiction and How Do You Recognize It?

How addiction acts

By now, that addiction is an awful disease is common knowledge. It's intense, fast-acting, and incredibly destructive. Many a person has fallen victim to addiction and many have seen first-hand what it can do to a person. The Mayo Clinic points out that substance abuse disorder can occur with legal or illegal substances. These substances include both alcohol and nicotine, and they should not be underestimated, just because they are legal.

Addictive behavior can also manifest itself through other habits, such as sex, gambling, shopping, food, etc. While any substance or activity that generates pleasure can become addictive and they can all be dangerous, abuse of substances like drugs is the most nefarious, because they modify the brain structure. The addict ends up losing control of one's actions in their pursuit of the substance.

How does addiction work?

In order to be able to combat it, we must first learn how addiction works. That includes the way these substances affect the brain. Here are the areas of the brain that are impacted by substance abuse and in what way.

The brain stem is the one sustaining basic human functions, including heart rate, breathing, or sleeping. The cerebral cortex is a complex part with several different areas, which each control a set of functions or senses. The frontal cortex, for example, is the one in charge of problem-solving and decision-making. The limbic system is important here, because it's the one linked with the pleasure circuit. It's like a reward system motivating us to keep performing essential actions to stay alive. This is severely impacted by drugs and that can have the consequence of mood swings for the user.



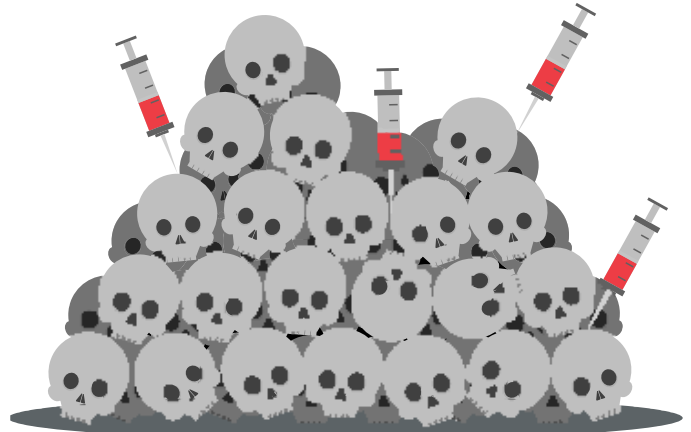
As for how the substances one abuses affect these functions, here is what happens: they modify the way neurons transmit information and what they transmit. Heroin and even something as seemingly innocuous as marijuana are capable of this, because they are not dissimilar to neurotransmitters. The receptors are confused into allowing the neurons to transmit this information. Other types of drugs, like amphetamines or cocaine work a bit differently: they release a higher number of neurotransmitters and that creates a stronger, more intense, disruptive message.

Dopamine is a key word here, because certain substances produce a significant amount of it; much higher than normal. Dopamine is produced by normal behaviors as well, but not nearly as much as these substances. Thus, the effect is an incredibly intense one, akin to euphoria. The individual who experiences this is motivated to continue to use in order to replicate that state. That creates the addictive behavior. The problem isn't only the repeat action and use, but also that the user becomes accustomed to this reaction and compared to it, the normal amount of pleasure is no longer enough to stimulate them. Satisfaction becomes more and more difficult and requires stronger stimulation. The real danger occurs when the brain gets used to the high amounts of dopamine, because in time, that leads to the individual experiencing weaker pleasure, or none at all. That occurs because the brain tries to balance out the abnormal amount of dopamine that was just produced by drugs by cutting back on dopamine production.



What about long-term effects?

Sooner or later, the user becomes depressed, because of their inability to experience pleasure. It can be a very confusing and distressing time, because the addict does not know why they are unable to enjoy the things they used to and why any pleasure is inhibited. It can be the beginning of a crisis and ultimately, of a situation where the only thing that still stimulates them is the substance, so they use it to the point of abuse in an effort to reach those dopamine levels. Tolerance to the drug pushes the addict to use more and more, putting them at risk of an overdose, and even death.



In fact, mental illness is not at all uncommon when it comes to drug use. The [National Institute of Drug Abuse](#) reports that every 6 out of 10 users may actually be suffering from mental illness as well as from substance abuse disorder. These users may be using substance abuse as a way to “treat” a condition that could otherwise be diagnosed.

The longer one abuses these kinds of substances, the more impactful and permanent are the changes in the neurons and brain circuits. The modifications in glutamate levels alone can result in inferior cognitive function. This is the neurotransmitter that controls learning ability.

Memory can be shaped to the point where certain things (including familiar elements and activities) become triggers for drug cravings. These effects can be long-lasting, appearing even once the addict has been sober for a while, making it incredibly difficult to give up using and remain sober. Regular and essential behaviors are also affected because of the modification in brain structure. As a result of long-acting addiction, one can become unable to make decisions and lose control over their behavior.

Who is the addict?

The most important thing to understand is that the addict can be anyone. It is completely false that only a certain kind of person or people from a certain type of background become addicts. Addicts are not inherently weak-willed, lacking in morals, etc. Anyone can become addicted to substances, at any age, and regardless of their social standing and perceived level of happiness, satisfaction, or fulfillment. We're going to discuss more about the reasons for drug use in the next section.





While anyone can become an addict, young people and teenagers, in general, are especially vulnerable, not only to the allure of certain substances or a certain kind of behavior, but also to the damage substances can cause. The brain is in development until one's early to mid-twenties. We make the legal demarcation at 18 for most legal decisions and assign responsibility, but there are also things individuals cannot do until they've reached 21, 25, or other ages. A brain that is in development and is actively changing is more susceptible to the impact on the prefrontal cortex, which is the part in charge of making decisions, which is why it's so easy for teenagers to fall into the trap of substance abuse.

Understanding the reasons for substance abuse

Before we can do anything to address the situation – with ourselves or with a loved one – one must understand why the addict uses, in the first place. Especially at this point, when we are fully aware of the negative effects of substance abuse and how addictive these substances are, what motivates an individual to use?

- **It's a form of escapism** – when reality is difficult to accept or even difficult to survive sober, people are vulnerable to momentary “solutions”, such as losing themselves in the short-term influence of a substance, whether that's alcohol or a drug. A desire for escapism is natural, but this is the most dangerous way to do it. The addict tries it once and enjoys the complete (or partial) break from reality that they experience. It allows one to forget about their problems and escape to a place where everything feels good. It's incredibly tempting for someone who is going through a hard time, but far from being a solution, it unfortunately ends up creating more problems.



- **It's pleasurable** – the pleasure component is incredibly strong, and very seductive. The addict is hooked by that first experience when the pleasure was so intense, and desires to repeat it. It's very tempting and very easy for one to be beckoned to return to using after that, because it's something that appeals to everyone at the most basic level, especially for people who are suffering, or otherwise bored, or looking for an enjoyable distraction. However, as we already discussed, that first overwhelmingly pleasurable experience can never be repeated, and the user is bound to start increasing the dose.
- **Peer pressure and a need to fit in** – peer pressure is still a concern, particularly among young, and teenage users. At this age, we seek acceptance and a seemingly simple, but very misguided way to seem "cool" is to start using whatever substance the social group is using, whether that's cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, or more dangerous drugs. Especially when refusal often means risking rejection and social ostracization, it becomes an even more fraught decision. This desire for normalcy can ultimately lead to bad, and poorly thought-out decisions.



What addiction looks like – Signs of addiction

Addiction manifests itself in a variety of ways and it engulfs one's entire being. You can spot signs of addiction (in yourself and in others) by looking for them in the way one looks, behaves, or feels. Signs can be physical, behavioral, or psychological, and they be more overt, or covert. It's difficult to tell for sure whether someone is a victim of addiction judging by just a few signs; addicts will typically present several symptoms from all of these categories.

Physical

Addiction is visible physically, if one knows what to look for in one's self or a loved one. Not only are the effects of the drugs visible, but also the effects of addictive behavior, in general, as well as withdrawal. Withdrawal signs will be discussed in a different section.

- **Insomnia** – a lack of sleep or losing the ability to sleep, or experiencing restlessness is a very common sign that something is not right. The addict frequently experiences issues sleeping, as the mind won't stop "working". Insomnia can be very dangerous, as lack of sleep leads to bigger problems, even unrelated to substance abuse, including paranoia and hallucinations.
- **Change in pupil size** – a dead giveaway that someone is currently under the influence or has used recently is a change in pupil size. Enlarged pupils (known as mydriasis) are one of the basic signs of drug use – and one of the most recognizable. What happens is that when the brain releases dopamine or serotonin, your pupils enlarge. One can even make an educated guess as to what specific drug or drug category was used, judging by the size of the pupils. Some of the substances that trigger pupil dilation are marijuana, ecstasy, mescaline, cocaine, LSD, amphetamines, but also SSRI antidepressants and others.



- **Unkempt appearance** – as a result of addiction and the excessive and obsessive preoccupation with consuming the substance over everything else, a victim may end up neglecting themselves, their appearance, their hygiene, their nutrition, and general self-care and well-being. A person with a substance abuse problem may have dark circles, unwashed and tangled hair, may be wearing clothes that are dirty, that have an unpleasant odor, or that are otherwise ill-fitting or inappropriate, and may generally lack signs of proper hygiene.
- **Bloodshot eyes** – bloodshot eyes can be a result of the previously mentioned insomnia, or it can be a sign of active use. Certain substances, including nicotine and marijuana, create this effect.
- **Body odor** – when the addict starts neglecting themselves and their self-care, including hygiene, body odor can be a giveaway. Especially when the substances (or withdrawal from the substances) causes excessive perspiration, that will cause an unpleasant, and very noticeable body odor that will tip most people off that something is not right. Lack of hygiene is always a cause for concern, because it's usually either a sign of drug use or depression, both of which require some sort of support or outside help.



- **Slurred speech** – slurred speech can often be a sign of active substance abuse, especially alcohol. While not every person who becomes inebriated is an addict, if one is in this state more often than not, it can be a sign of addiction.
- **Sudden and dramatic changes in weight, whether loss or gain** – with addiction taking priority over other aspects of one's life, the substance abuse victim may neglect proper nutrition or the opposite – overeating may become a problem. Remember that eating disorders can also be addictive behavior.
- **Lack of coordination** – most commonly exhibited while under the influence, lack of coordination is an obvious sign that the individual is using. It can be the result of a number of substances – most commonly, alcohol – and it becomes incredibly dangerous when the addict is driving, operating heavy machinery, or caring for a child or a person who is otherwise vulnerable.



Behavioral

Oftentimes when someone falls victim to addiction, a very tell-tale sign is their modified behavior. They no longer act like they used to, and while in the beginning this change in behavior can be overlooked, it soon becomes noticeable enough to be a cause for concern. Here are some of the things to look out for or that you might have noticed in a loved one or even in yourself that may lead you to suspect addiction.

- **A sudden and increasing desire for solitude** – while a desire for privacy and alone time is completely normal and may arise suddenly, especially in teenagers, coupled with other signs, it can indicate addiction. Addicts often retreat to use in solitude or hide it from partners, friends, or family members.



- **A lack of funds or an increase in financial issues** – when someone starts using regularly and in increasing amounts, that is going to severely impact their finances. It is common for the addict to start sacrificing other things and cut into their budget for groceries, rent, and other living expenses. The need for the substance supersedes anything else and they may appear to be struggling financially more than they used to. This isn't only true of drugs, but also tobacco or alcohol, and of course, addictions like gambling or shopping.
- **Giving up on activities or habits they enjoy** – someone who is a victim of substance abuse may gradually start giving up on things they used to enjoy, whether because of the lack of funds, a physical inability to perform (in a sport, for example), or because their time and focus are on the substance, how to acquire it, or how to spend more time using.
- **Giving up on spending time with people** – when you're addicted, everything you do relates to your ability to use. So, for example, an addict may avoid to spend time with friends and family who keep dry houses, or to go to indoor venues where there is no smoking allowed. They may prefer to spend all their time with people who share and indulge their addiction, whether that's alcohol, drugs, etc.
- **Defensive or enabling behavior** – a lot of the time, an addict will encourage others to partake in a substance, even getting aggressive about it at times. Imagine a friend who is personally offended when others choose to not drink alcohol – if they drink with someone else, it normalizes their behavior and they don't have to admit they have a problem. If someone chooses to abstain, it forces the addict to be confronted with their own inability to do the same.

- **Denial of dependency** – in a similar vein, a lot of people who struggle with substance abuse will have trouble admitting it, and will be in denial and intense defensiveness about it. They will not admit they have an issue, they will say that it is being blown out of proportion and that they can stop whenever they want. They can often become aggressive and ultimately, secretive, because they believe other people “don’t understand” and they don’t want to be exposed to the associated concern.
- **Possession of large amounts of said substance** – an addict will always have a stash, back-up, or supply of their substance of choice, whether that’s cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs. If you or a loved one cannot stand the thought of not having a certain substance (or a certain amount of a substance) available at all times, that is a cause for concern.
- **Obsessive thoughts** – as the addiction progresses, the addict will find themselves obsessing over the substance, acquiring it, and using it. Their priority in life becomes the substance they are addicted to, and everything else falls into second place, including basic obligations, such as work or children.
- **Legal trouble** – sooner or later, victims of addiction may end up in legal trouble; not necessarily because of illegal possession, but because of impaired judgement as a result of the consumption of said substance, violent or otherwise destructive behavior, or even stealing as a means of acquiring more of the substance in question.



Psychological/Emotional

There are a lot of psychological and emotional signs that one may notice, perhaps more in themselves than in others. Here are some of the changes you can expect to see in a person who has a substance abuse problem:

- **Personality and attitude changes** – addiction has a big impact on one's personality and it can often change it dramatically. People who were once calm, collected, and easy-going can make a complete shift and start acting like someone completely different. These changes are always negative, and they usually lead to the person acting in a more violent manner, sensitive to accusations, quick to anger, etc.
- **Lack of attention** – someone who is using will quite often appear to be scatter-brained, distracted, and with an unusually short attention span. This kind of restlessness is not typically encountered, unless the individual is under the influence or is currently trying to acquire their next dose. Once the individual becomes addicted, it's hard to focus on anything else, but the next time they get to use, because their body is craving it.
- **Mood swings** – mood swings are to be expected with victims of substance abuse. They're related to other signs like paranoia, anger and irritability, which can appear suddenly and seemingly for no reason. They are a sign of mental instability and a general lack of control over one's own emotions and reactions.





- **Withdrawing emotionally** – while people sometimes do need to withdraw and be with their own thoughts, distancing oneself from everyone around them and not connecting emotionally is a reason for concern. Addicts often become loners or start making new connections with the people who enable their addictions. If someone is suddenly distant, you may want to look further into it.
- **Anger and irritability** – anger and irritability are tell-tale signs of substance abuse and go hand in hand with the paranoia and anxiousness that are also side-effects of this kind of addiction. The addict will become increasingly irritable when questioned about their behavior, when confronted with their substance abuse problem, or when they are prevented from using or acquiring the substance in question.
- **Anxiousness** – we already know that substances don't just affect the body, but the mind, as well. An addict often presents an uptick in anxious behavior and experiencing anxiety. This is either because of their fear of being discovered, the anxiety that comes with finding the next dose, etc.
- **Lack of motivation** – the addict is rarely motivated by anything else, but substance abuse in this period, so they may lose interest and motivation for regular things they used to enjoy or that used to motivate them, such as work, passion projects, etc.
- **Paranoia** – paranoia is one of the most easily identifiable signs of addictive behavior. The victim of substance abuse becomes irrational and refuses to see reality or listen to facts. They become withdrawn, scared, and constantly sure that they are in danger. The outside world becomes the enemy as the addict becomes increasingly paranoid.
- **Deflection** – deflecting blame is also a typical behavior that is encountered in addicts, especially when confronted about their substance abuse. They change the subject, refuse to accept blame, and place the blame on other factors or other people around them rather than accept that their issue is substance abuse.

Signs of an overdose

Just like it's important to be able to spot the signs of addictive behavior, it's essential to be able to recognize an overdose. Being able to identify this happening can make the difference between living or dying for the victim of substance abuse, so if you notice one or several signs in this list in someone you know, seek help and medical attention immediately:

- Violent and aggressive behavior
- Delusions
- Breathing difficulty
- Agitation
- Hallucinations
- Loss of consciousness
- Trouble walking or extreme drowsiness
- Vomiting or nausea



Signs of withdrawal

A victim of drug abuse who has been using regularly and becomes addicted will have changed the chemical structure of the brain. The body of the addict becomes accustomed to having the substance in certain quantities, and in its absence, it reacts in unpleasant, uncomfortable, painful, and even dangerous ways. Here are just some of the withdrawal signs to look out for, as per the [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence](#):

- Depression
- Appetite loss
- Seizures
- Fever
- Vomiting & nausea
- Trembling & shakiness
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Hallucinations
- Insomnia
- Confusion

Withdrawal must not be underestimated, because it's extremely powerful, both physically and psychologically. An addict may need help (even medical help) to overcome these symptoms and this period, so whether you are the one experiencing these effects or if it's a loved one, please seek professional help.



The difference between healthy and addictive behavior surrounding substances

The difficulty in spotting addictive behavior is in the fact that not all of these signs are completely obvious all the time, and not all of them automatically lead you to a conclusion involving addiction. Recreational and moderate use of substances is possible, so it becomes difficult to judge the difference between what is correlation and what is causation.

Is any person who has a healthy stash of alcohol in their home an alcoholic? How many cigarettes a day can one smoke without being addicted to nicotine? Is using marijuana make you a substance abuser? Is it ever ok to use drugs recreationally? How do you tell the difference when moderate or recreational use becomes a cause for concern? Here are some of the behaviors that may be ambiguous and the difference between healthy and addictive behavior.



Getting drunk/ getting drunk quickly

Social drinking and becoming inebriated is very common behavior that is exhibited by a significant portion of the population, both male and female, and of various ages. The simple act of becoming inebriated is not a sign of addiction in itself, but simply of consuming a certain amount of alcohol.



A lot of people think that being an alcoholic is about assigning a certain amount or how quickly one becomes inebriated. For example, you're an alcoholic if you drink X amount. However, alcohol consumption and how much is too much is relative, as every person has a different threshold. A petite young woman with a small frame who doesn't usually drink will become inebriated a lot quicker than a tall, heavy man who drinks regularly, for example. The latter will have a higher tolerance.

The effect of alcohol and how quickly or intensely it will be felt also depends on whether or not the person is drinking on an empty stomach, or if they've had a hearty meal beforehand, which can soak up some of the alcohol and build up tolerance.

Drinking regularly/every day

When it comes to regular drinking, things enter a gray area. Drinking alcohol every single day is certainly not recommended. However, if one were to have a glass of wine with dinner every evening, for example, that would not be a sign of alcohol abuse, addiction, or alcoholism. Addiction is most of all characterized by a loss of control, inability to resist consumption, and succumbing completely to the need for the substance.



With that in mind, if one consumes alcohol regularly in large quantities, becomes inebriated often, or drinks every day because they cannot help themselves or are experiencing symptoms of withdrawal, then that is a sign of alcoholism.



Smoking regularly

Tobacco, perhaps even more than alcohol, is a very addictive substance. But because addiction is so complex, a smoking addiction is almost never only about the actual nicotine, but about the habit itself and the oral fixation. The smoker becomes addicted as a coping mechanism for a stressful situation they are experiencing. Smoking becomes a security blanket that they turn to whenever they experience anxiety, irritation, stress, anger, etc.

While “social smoking” is often cited by smokers when confronted, more often than not, the addictive behavior has already become a habit. There are people who are able to overcome this addiction easier than others, but generally speaking, it’s a very difficult process that often results in picking up a different addiction as a coping mechanism.

Using marijuana illegally

Using marijuana does not make one an addict, and neither does using it somewhere where it is not legal. However, illegal use and possession may attract legal consequences, such as fines, community service, or even jail time. The addictive properties of marijuana and whether or not they exist are often debated. While the substance itself is not addictive, the effects of it can be.

Using marijuana regularly isn’t necessarily a sign of addiction, but being under the influence of this substance at all times is. Just like with alcohol, marijuana alters one’s mind and can lead to endangering oneself and those around them because it slows our reflexes and our cognitive function.

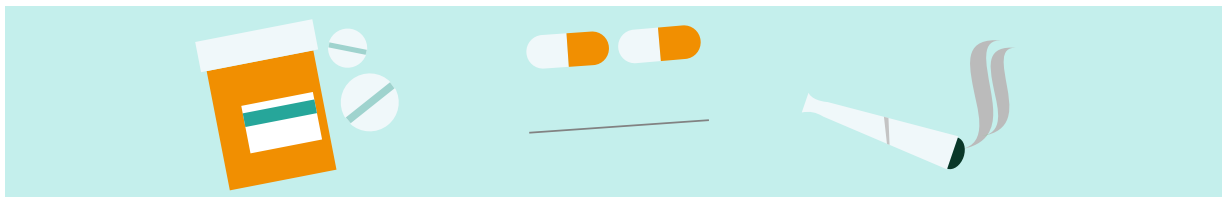


Using illegal drugs

Generally speaking, illegal drugs are known as “hard” drugs and they are not only highly addictive, but very dangerous and unhealthy. A lot of people consider people who’ve ever used illegal substances addicts or substance abusers, but it’s important to retain the difference between using a substance and abusing it.

Illegal drug use, while addictive, dangerous, and potentially even lethal, is not necessarily a sign of addiction. One can consume substances several times without falling down an addictive spiral. Like we said earlier, the key thing with addiction is loss of control. However, recreational use can very quickly slip into abuse as a result of a false sense of security.

Illegal drug use, even recreationally, is never recommended, not only because the dangers they pose to oneself, but also because of the very serious legal trouble they can attract.



Using prescription drugs

A significant amount of people abuse prescription drugs, from painkillers (opioids) to amphetamines and other stimulants (Ritalin, Adderall, etc.), or anxiety medication like Ativan, Xanax, or Valium (benzodiazepines), according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

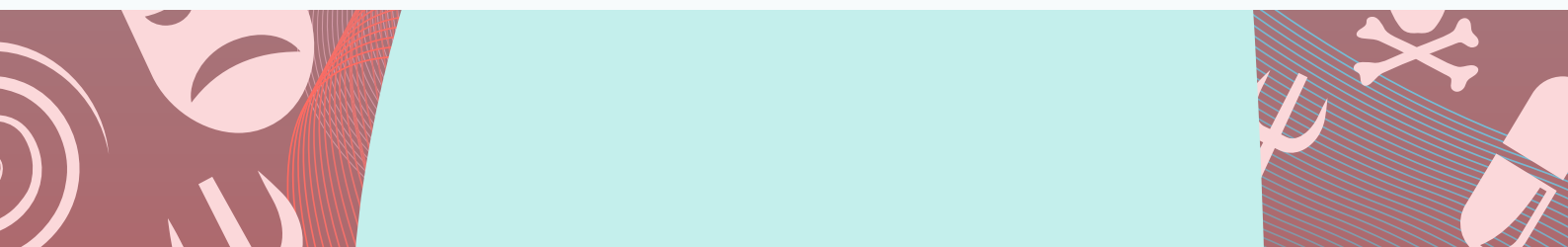
Obviously, not everyone who uses prescription drugs abuses them, and not everyone becomes addicted, even though they can certainly become addictive. Some of the prescription drug abusers become addicted as a result of regular, justified use. However, other people steal them, purchase them illegally, or commit medical fraud to get them from a medical professional in order to sustain an already active addiction.

Prescription drugs can be very dangerous, as they can cause overdoses, or have an altered influence if they are mixed with alcohol or other pills, which substance abusers are often known to do.



CHAPTER 2

Where To Start With Addiction:
First Steps and Having The Right Mindset



What is the right recovery mindset?

When it comes to addiction, the mindset is often the secret to everything. In short, you cannot start on a healthy, successful journey of overcoming addiction or helping someone else recover if you don't start out with the correct mindset. Hopefully, you will have gained that after learning more about addiction in the first chapter and understanding it better, but if not, let's talk about what the right mindset is, no matter if it's you or a loved one who is struggling with addiction.



Keep in mind that addiction is a disease

This is an important message everyone should keep in mind – addiction is not a choice. Addiction is a disease, and it's extremely important for it to be treated that way. That means understanding the way the disease works and pursuing treatment, as a priority. When you change your mindset and have a full understanding of the way addiction works, you are better equipped to deal with the aftermath and everything that is involved in the treatment process, both as an addict and as a supporter.



Don't play the blame game

There are so many misconceptions about addicts, what kind of people addicts are, and what sort of moral failings lead to addiction. Remember that this is a disease like any other. Just like we would not blame or judge a diabetic, we should not place blame and judgement on the addict's shoulders. You may have been hurt by the addict and their behavior, and there may be some negative feelings brewing, but it's important for them to be expressed in a healthy way, in therapy.

Shaming the addict is not an effective way to encourage them to make healthier choices and positive changes, **according to research**, because it's painful, embarrassing, and ultimately, isolating. It does nothing but further hurt the addict's mental health and it can push them to spiral back out of control, instead of helping.

Recovery is the goal

The ultimate goal, here, and that is what everyone should be focusing on. It's important to keep looking forward and encourage the addict to look forward, as well, to a new, better, healthier life, where they are able to make better choices. Keeping the goal in mind is crucial, because it serves as excellent motivation to keep going and to remain sober over the course of the treatment, and later, once they leave the treatment facility.



Expect to run into hurdles

Being optimistic is great, and an essential aspect – and we'll talk about it in a second – but one must also be prepared for the realities of addiction treatment. Progress is not linear; the addict often falters in their determination and relapses are very common. One may even need to start all over again once or twice, and all of that is completely normal, and to be expected. Don't lose your motivation. We're going to discuss relapse more in-depth in a future chapter.



Remain optimistic

In a process that is this long and difficult, it's essential to remain positive and optimistic. This disease will be beat, and no matter the hardships, and if you retain your optimism in this journey, you'll be able to overcome these hurdles more easily. Remember that it's a process, so it will take some time.



What are the first steps to take?

When you first recognize addiction, it can be shocking, and most people don't know what comes next. Almost everyone is aware that treatment must follow, but what are those very first steps to take?

If you are the addict

1. Admit that you have a problem

It's a cliché at this point, but the first step remains the same: accepting that you have a problem. Sometimes, this first step is the most difficult one, because coming to terms with the fact that you are an addict and you have a substance abuse issue is a hard thing to do. We all like to believe that we are invincible, and that it couldn't possibly happen to us, but when it does, it's essential to be able to admit it and accept it.

2. Accept the fact that you need help

Another thing that can be quite difficult to accept is the fact that it's very hard – and perhaps even impossible – to do this alone. Recovery is a long, complex, and taxing process, both physically and emotionally. This is the time to let go of pride and accept outside help. In fact, ideally, you will actively seek it out. The sooner you accept your condition and understand the need for help, the sooner you can be on the road to recovery.





3. Be prepared for a long journey

If you understand how insidious addiction is and how deeply it impacts the human brain and the human body, you will know that this journey towards recovery will not be easy, and it will not be brief. You need to mentally and emotionally prepare to spend a long time fighting this disease and making efforts every single day to become stronger than your addictive tendencies.

4. Start making some lifestyle changes

Obviously, you will have to stop using to be able to overcome the substance abuse problem, but that's not the only change that will come with you starting treatment. Depending on how far along into this you are, getting sober may require some big lifestyle changes, such as keeping your distance from certain friends and undesirable elements, removing triggers from your life, changing your habits, etc. There's going to be more of this when you actually start your treatment, but be prepared to do a complete overhaul of your life in order to get healthy.



If your loved one is the addict

1. Offer help with their recovery

An addict cannot embark on this journey alone, and they will need your help, especially if they have not yet realized that they are suffering from a substance abuse problem. The people around the individual notice the (negative) changes that occur and can clearly see the signs of addiction long before the addict themselves. If you notice the signs of addiction we covered in Chapter 1 in your loved one, please address a medical professional, another close friend or relative, or an interventionist to decide how to best offer help to the addict.

2. Support your loved one emotionally

Addiction and the subsequent treatment process is incredibly difficult for the addict, and they will experience a lot of hardships, a lot of different emotions, and they may find it overwhelming. They need someone who will support them unconditionally and who will not judge them for their disease. Something as simple as offering non-judgmental support and understanding the way addiction works can do wonders for a person who is lost and scared of what the recovery process may mean for them.

3. Be the source of encouragement your loved one needs

The addict will also need encouragement from the people who love them. They are about to undergo a long, arduous process, and at times, they will stumble and perhaps even relapse. It's a difficult time and it's hard to not lose hope or optimism. That's why your continued support and encouragement is so important, even when it seems like the treatment isn't succeeding.



CHAPTER 3

How To Help Yourself Overcome Addiction



One thing is clear – overcoming addiction is no simple task, and the road to recovery is long and difficult. But that doesn't mean it's impossible. However hard it may be, addiction can be overcome and you can regain control over your own actions, over your body, and over your life. There are a lot of different aspects involved in successfully completing this journey, and you will need help from your loved ones and from professionals, but at the end of the day, the first person who needs to help you is yourself. Here is what YOU can do to help yourself overcome addiction.

Steps you can take towards recovery

What you need to remember here is that treatment for addiction is not one-size-fits-all, meaning that what might work for one individual will not work for another. There is no set number of steps, and while the 12-step program is very popular, it doesn't work for everyone in the same way. Here are just some steps that have generated positive results for other individuals struggling with addiction, as recommended by the [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#). Remember that if they don't work for you, it's a matter of modifying the treatment.

Step 1 – Treatment initiation

Initiating the actual treatment is the first step in the active recovery process. It starts when you reach out and ask for (or otherwise accept) help from medical professionals or from the people around you. Sometimes, people come to the realization that they are suffering from addiction, but other times, an intervention organized by their loved ones is needed as a wake-up call. Either way, this first step is important, because it marks the big change in your attitude and behavior: you want to get better and you are accepting treatment at a facility.

Since this is early on in the process, you may have a million questions, you may feel unsure, you may be experiencing anxiety, etc. You are not yet outside of reach from your addiction, and you may still have second thoughts. However, this is normal, and in the end, it may even strengthen your resolve, because you need to overcome these thoughts and these doubts and make the active decision to remain in rehab to seek treatment.



Step 2 – Early abstinence



While simply abstaining is not the end of your addiction by any means, abstinence from the substance does play a part and it is the second step in most treatment facilities and rehab programs. Early abstinence is often excruciatingly difficult for most recovering addicts, because the withdrawal symptoms affect you very severely at this stage. For most, it is the first time they've attempted to not use for a prolonged period of time, and it can be very painful and mentally taxing.

You may experience physical pain, mental anguish, emotional instability, and very intense cravings and triggers that may make it very tempting to relent and use again. It's going to be a very hard time, but a very important one. This is also the stage where the rehab counselor introduces some healthy coping skills we'll discuss later in this chapter to help promote a healthy lifestyle and reintegration in normal society and help avoid unhealthy coping mechanisms and replacement addictions. This stage lasts until you achieve 90 days of abstinence.

Step 3 – Maintaining abstinence



After those first 90 days of initial abstinence, you transition into the third stage, where you are tasked with maintaining this abstinence. At this stage, you can move out of the treatment facility and into the outpatient stage where you get counseling on how to successfully maintain this progress you've made with abstinence and avoid triggers and temptations for relapses. You will be made familiar with the signs of a relapse – that we will also detail in a future chapter – and how to avoid them. The tools you learn during the previous stage and that we will discuss further also become important at this stage. This stage is quite extended, lasting for around 5 years.

Step 4 – Advanced recovery

If you manage and retain your sobriety for 5 years, then you can move on to the fourth stage in your recovery journey, which is advanced recovery. Your life should have been free of substances for this entire period, and will hopefully continue to be from this point forward. You can put all of the tools you've acquired to good use in order to live a good, sober life that is fulfilling and brings you all the satisfaction one normally enjoys.

By this stage, you will have acquired the necessary skills to maintain this sobriety with less effort and be the best member of society you can be – a better friend, offspring, spouse, etc.

But one must not mistake this with being “cured”; recovery is an ongoing process that is never completely finished. A former addict is always in recovery, and there is also a risk of relapse, because the triggers are still there, and the tendency towards addictive behavior still exists. What changes is the way the recovering addict lives their life and the effort they put into maintaining a sober lifestyle.

The four stages of recovery are essential in any addict's recovery journey, and while some of the steps or specifics may change from person to person, the basic stages are still the same. There are things you can do to continue to support your sobriety, even years after beginning your treatment, like counseling sessions, practicing some of the healthy coping behaviors taught to you, or even continuing to be a member of a support group.

Another big part of maintaining sobriety and a big incentive is taking on the responsibility of becoming a sponsor for another recovering addict at the beginning of their own journey. You will be tasked with supporting them and keeping them in check, and will thus be so much more aware of your own behavior and sobriety and how you can promote this for your own sake and for the recovering addict you are helping.



Recognize and stop unhealthy coping mechanisms

Unfortunately, it's not enough to just stop using and allow the substances to leave your body. Knowing how addiction works and the way the structure of your brain is different now, you are more vulnerable to addictive behavior, in general. That means that in absence of the substance you originally became addicted to, you may pick up a different kind of addiction (not necessarily to a substance) as a coping mechanism for the addiction you've left behind.

Obviously, this behavior is unhealthy, and it can even be dangerous, depending on what the replacement addiction is. A lot of the time, the recovering addicts who experience this don't even realize it, because they are not aware of the full extent of addiction and how far its reach goes.

One important piece of information and the main take-away here is that almost anything can become an addiction – more often than not, it's not the actual substance or activity that is the problem, but the rush you get from it that becomes addictive.

Here are some of the “replacement addictions” you may develop as a coping mechanism:

- Eating disorders
- Smoking
- Prescription drugs
- Gambling
- Shopping
- Sex
- Hoarding



It can be difficult to recognize behaviors related to these actions as addiction because they seem relatively “harmless”, compared to the possibly “harder” substance the addict was abusing before. But any addictive behavior is unhealthy, and just because they are not as dangerous or the negative effects aren’t immediately apparent, it doesn’t mean these addictions are without consequences.

Each and every one of these behaviors can take over your life to the point of loss of control over your own actions, just like before. That’s why it’s essential to be able to keep your behavior in check and put hard limits and boundaries in your life, in relation to any substance or behavior, lest you fall into old patterns.

Here are some signs that you are using a new addiction to a substance or activity as an unhealthy coping mechanism:

- You turn to this behavior whenever you are experiencing strong negative emotions, such as anxiety, anger, fear, depression, etc. Eating, smoking, and shopping can be very tempting “quick fixes” to these feelings, but the effect is ephemeral.
- You interrupt regular activities or wake up during the night in order to engage in these behaviors. At this point, this activity or substance begins to take precedence over your normal life, which is not healthy.
- You spend long stretches of time engaging in these particular behaviors. See: gambling all night, hours-long online shopping sprees, chain-smoking, etc.
- You abuse these substances or behaviors to the point of feeling physically ill or harming yourself in other ways, including financially, emotionally, etc. For example, eating until you feel sick, gambling or shopping to the point of going into debt or even financial ruin, hoarding things to the point where your home is unlivable, etc.



- You neglect yourself and your loved ones in favor of the addiction. For example, spending days on end gambling or gaming, all while neglecting to feed yourself, exercise proper hygiene, take care of your family, go to work, clean the home, etc.
- You have very strong feelings related to this activity or substance and you don't want to or don't feel like you can give it up. You experience feelings of fear and anxiety when you think about this habit being taken away.
- People around you have expressed concerns related to this new habit, but you've dismissed them, convinced that it's not a real problem.



Adopt healthy coping mechanisms instead

Thankfully, unhealthy coping mechanisms can be stopped before they become full-blown addictions, if you are aware and careful. It's also easier to stop engaging in these unhealthy behaviors if you have healthy coping mechanisms to replace the unhealthy ones you've been practicing. Here are some healthy coping mechanisms for recovering addicts that will keep the risk of relapse and other new addictions at bay:

- Make a point to adopt a healthy diet; this not only helps avoid unhealthy coping mechanisms like binge-eating, but it also makes you feel better about yourself in general, and gives you a new activity to engage in and a skill to improve.
- Start an exercise routine. The benefits of exercising are presented everywhere, and that's for good reason – exercise releases endorphins and makes you feel good about yourself. In addition, it's something active that gets you out of bed and out of your routine, and it's something positive you do for yourself, your health, and your appearance.
- Go to therapy. This is a big one and it may seem obvious, but it's worth mentioning that going to therapy isn't only helpful, it's probably almost mandatory to re-learn how to lead a normal, healthy life with healthy coping skills. As a recovering addict, you've been





through some tough times, so you can use the help from a professional who can support you and your mental health.

- Identify your triggers and avoid them as much as possible by introducing positive coping strategies. For example, if you compulsively shop to fill a void when you're lonely, start making it a rule to call a friend, instead. Even better, have social activities planned throughout the week, so that your social quota is always fulfilled and you don't have to find yourself lonely and sad and desperately trying to avoid it.
 - Relationships are a big factor here as well, because a lot of the time, it is unsavory relationships that can be the triggers or the enablers for unhealthy behavior.
- Remove toxic people from your life, people who are not supportive, people who make you feel bad about yourself, people who make you uncomfortable, who give you anxiety, or who encourage or otherwise push you to engage in addictive or unhealthy behavior
- Adopt meditation, mindfulness, or relaxation practices. Stress management is actually a major part of healthily coping with addiction recovery. Stress factors make it much more likely for a former addict to relapse or be tempted to relapse, so finding alternative, healthier means of coping with stress is essential. Meditation exercises, learning to adopt mindfulness in your life, or engage in relaxation practices at key moments can save your life.

CHAPTER 4

How To Help Others Overcome Addiction



What happens when you are not the one struggling with addiction, and you are not the one who is in need of help? This can be a unique burden to bear, as a person who loves an individual who has a problem with substance abuse. Maybe you recognized the signs we discussed in your loved one, and you know that you must help, and that you want to help, you're just not sure how.

How can you provide help effectively? To what extent is it ok to support your loved one? How can you make sure you are not doing more harm than good? What kind of behavior is considered enabling on your part? Is there anything you need to avoid? How do you help someone who desperately needs it, but without pushing them further away?

The answers to all of these questions and more will be detailed in this chapter meant to help you help others overcome their addiction.



Steps to take with a loved one

Here are the steps you can take to accompany and help a loved one in their journey towards recovery. Remember that the process will not be easy, and it will not be quick, but it will be worth it.

Step 1 – Mutual trust is essential

Oftentimes, when an individual is struggling with addiction, there are some trust issues involved that go both ways – the addict has most likely broken the trust of their loved one and engaged in hurtful behaviors. On the other hand, the addict may also have trouble trusting their friend or family member, both because of the inherent defensiveness and paranoia and because their loved one might have said or done something that may have broken that trust.



It's a difficult situation for both parties, but trust is essential to the process, so it's important for it to be re-established. Keep these things in mind:

- If you use substances, the individual may consider you a hypocrite (for example, insisting that they need help for their alcohol problem, but continuing to drink alcohol).
- Trusting each other does not mean you have to tolerate unacceptable behavior nor does it mean you have to accept or condone substance abuse. If you do not feel like you can regain your trust right now, that is completely fine.
- Help should be offered gently and cautiously, because the addict may feel like you are exhibiting controlling behavior, leading them to abuse more.
- Engaging in lecturing behavior, criticizing behavior, or continued nagging may alienate the addict.
- The addict must have an incentive to change their behavior, so do not protect them from consequences as a means of establishing trust. That would just enable them to continue their behavior.
- Calling each other names or yelling at each other does nothing to strengthen the bond of trust and only further alienates the addict.
- If being around you is stressful for the addict, that may push them into using more, instead of discouraging them from using at all.

Step 2 – Do not neglect yourself

It may seem selfish or counter-intuitive, but airplane rules are in effect here: you have to put your oxygen mask first, before you can put on someone else's. That is to say, be aware of the fact that being in a relationship with someone with substance abuse and being one of their primary support people is incredibly hard – psychologically, emotionally, and physically – and a very stressful process.

Make sure that you don't neglect yourself and that you have some healthy coping mechanisms to manage your stress levels, just like the addict has for their own stress. You cannot help anyone else if you suffer from burnout or if your mental health is not in great shape.

Here are some of the things you can do to take care of yourself:

- Accept that this is a difficult and stressful process
- Do not blame yourself for your loved one's actions
- Attend therapy sessions
- Join a group for the families of addicts, like Al-Anon
- Make time for something you love and fills you with positive energy



Step 3 – Keep the lines of communication open

Going back to the issue of trust, it's very important that your loved one has someone they trust who they can talk to openly. You can be that person for them, if you are willing to listen and communicate calmly, without judging, and without pre-conceived notions. Allow them to be honest with you and communicate what they need to. That will do more for their sense of trust than anything else.

Step 4 – Show them compassion

It can be surprising how little compassion is given to people who suffer from substance abuse addiction. They are judged, assumptions are made surrounding their morality or the weakness of their character, and people think that they need to be treated badly in order to convince them to change. But you catch more flies with honey, and that is also true of helping loved ones who are struggling with addiction.

More than anything, they need support and understanding in this journey. They need to be shown compassion, instead of being pushed away and isolated, which can lead them to relapse. It's been demonstrated that people who don't benefit from support from the people around them have a harder time getting treatment and remaining sober. A good, strong support network is absolutely essential in this process.

Compassion is what can get an addict to put their trust in you and open up. They will feel comfortable with you and will communicate, instead of shutting down. It can also help them understand the ramifications of their actions and how much they are impacting your life and the lives of the people around them, instead of going on the defensive. Here are some ways of showing compassion:



- Making an ongoing effort to understand addiction
- Attending therapy with the recovering addict
- Caring for the recovering addict
- Listening and showing understanding for their suffering

Step 5 – Encourage and support positive lifestyle changes

By now, you will know that overcoming addiction involves more than just abstaining from the substance. It requires a complete lifestyle change and the adoption of new habits and activities, and it can be a difficult transition to make. That's why it's important for the addict to receive support and encouragement in making these healthy changes.

You can show support by doing something as simple as teaching your loved one a healthy recipe or cooking with them, signing up for a meditation class together, pledging to give up alcohol as well, making a habit out of going out running together every morning, introducing them to some new friends, etc. Anything that makes it easier for them to adopt this new lifestyle and associate it with positive thing is a great step.



Step 6 – Respect and aid in the treatment process

The ideal kind of support will depend on the type of treatment your family member or friend is getting. You may be actively involved in the treatment process, or they may be undergoing treatment alone. Here are some things to keep in mind:

If your loved one is undergoing treatment alone

- Don't insist that the recovering addict tells you about what they talk about in therapy. It is their privacy and they have a right to it.
- Be patient with the process. Attempting to undo the damage of addiction is a slow and lengthy process.
- Do not disseminate any of the recovering addict's personal information, including the fact that they are in a rehab facility. Their treatment is private for a reason and informing everyone may be detrimental to their success.

If you are actively involved in the treatment process

- Avoid placing blame or bringing criticism to the addict during treatment and counseling. You can present your experience objectively, but without becoming aggressive or judgmental about it.
- Try to lead by example, when it comes to the behaviors you want your loved one to emulate. That includes changes in lifestyle, abstinence from substances, etc. Inspiring and supporting your loved one in this way helps them feel less alone.
- Maintain honesty throughout the process about what the experience has been like for you. Do not shy away from the consequences the addict's behavior may have had on your life.
- Be prepared to hear harsh things and even that you may be a contributing factor to your loved one's addiction. Oftentimes, families or spouses and the associated expectations can be stressful factors that lead to the desire of release through substance use.
- Trust is important throughout this entire experience, so keep working on that.



Recognizing signs of codependency

Too often, when one person is struggling with addiction, they are in a codependent relationship with another person who is very close to them, whether they are a parent, a friend, a child, or a spouse. Codependency is born out of a genuine desire to show support and love, and help the addict, but that can result in enabling one's addiction, instead of genuinely helping them in any real sense. Here are some signs that you may be in a co-dependent relationship with your loved one:

1. You prioritize their feelings over your own

Codependent friends or relatives of addicts often feel selfish for thinking about their own feelings, so they focus on the addict's feelings, instead. You may find yourself prioritizing their feelings and neglecting your own, neglecting your needs, your beliefs, other values you hold dear, etc. Your support for the addict should not come at the expense of your own well-being.

2. You find it difficult to identify or express your feelings

You may find that you are so overly focused on treating, saving, or otherwise fixing the addict and are so hyper-focused on their feelings, that you may have difficulty in expressing or even identifying your own. You should not lose yourself at any stage because you are supporting your addicted friend or family member. Your thoughts and feelings are still valid, including negative feelings surrounding your experience with the addict themselves. You are allowed to be scared, angry, depressed, anxious, etc.

3. You take responsibility for your loved one

This is very common with families of addicts; the family feels like they are helping the addict and protecting them by taking over responsibility for the addict's irresponsible behavior. But that is not helping, as much as it is enabling. You mustn't make yourself unhappy to make your loved one happy, and making them happy should never involve covering up or cleaning up their literal or metaphorical messes.

Remember that you are not responsible for the addict or their actions (even if they are your child) and that it is not up to you to save them from consequences. Making excuses for the addict only pushes them deeper into addiction.

4. You have a hard time setting boundaries

Do you find it hard to say “no” to your loved one? When substance abuse is involved, that is an even bigger problem. We should have healthy boundaries with everyone around us, especially with people who are exhibiting signs of erratic, irresponsible behavior or are otherwise under the influence.

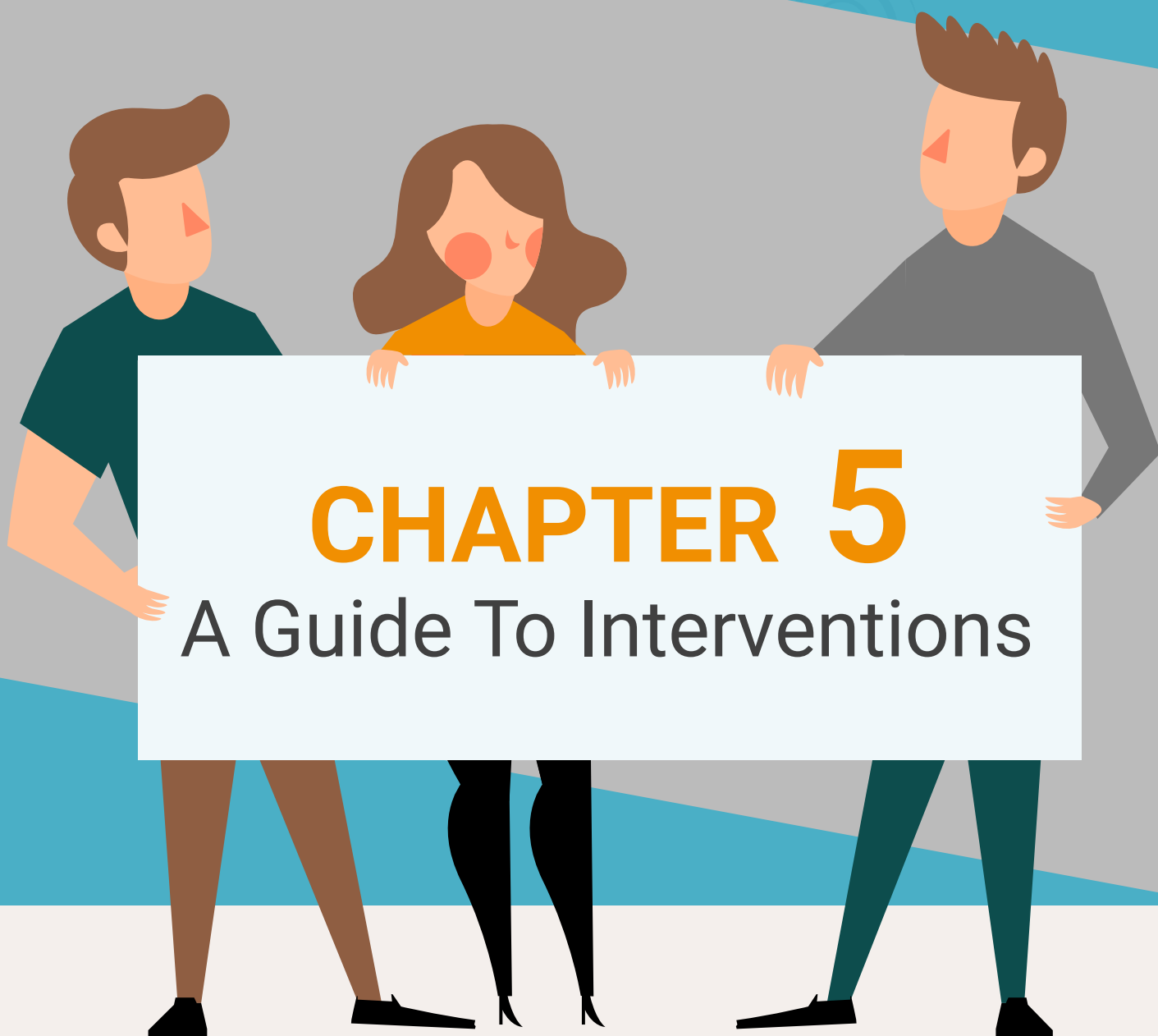
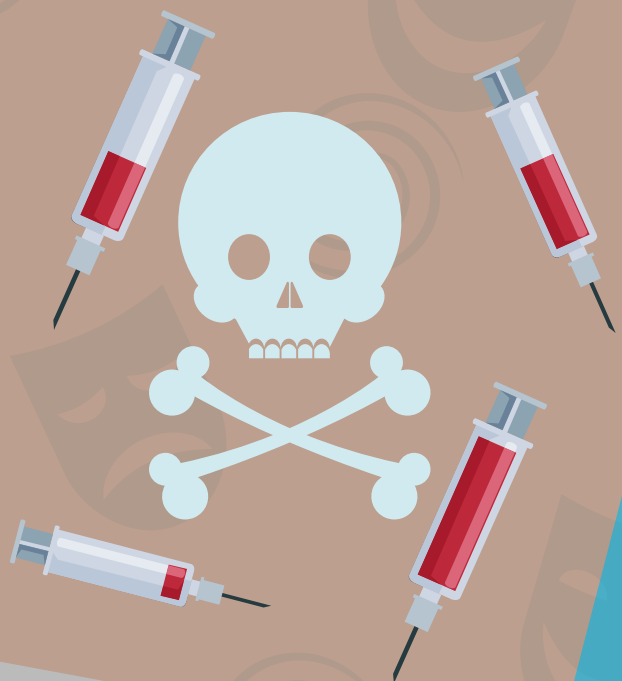
If the actions of the addict make you uncomfortable, you are allowed to say no. Remember that you must not set yourself on fire to keep them warm. Put your well-being first, and take your own feelings into account. That does not make you selfish or a bad person, and it does not mean you love them less or that you are responsible for their consequences.

5. You fear the deterioration of the relationship

Wanting the relationship to remain strong is normal, but you cannot allow your fear of abandonment or fear of the deterioration of the relationship to take over. If your loved one is under the influence, they will likely not be able to reciprocate in a healthy way, but enabling their addiction with money, access to substances, or help shirking their responsibilities is not the way to keep the relationship. The addict must first become healthy in order to be able to maintain a healthy relationship.

If you recognize yourself in these behaviors, then you may be in a codependent relationship with the addict in your life. You can take steps to get out of this situation and break the cycle of inadvertently enabling their addiction. Even if the addict is not yet ready to admit they have a problem and accept help, you can seek counseling and professional help for your own sake and for the sake of the addict. You will learn more tools that will help you set boundaries and separate yourself from the addict and their negative influence.





CHAPTER 5

A Guide To Interventions

What is an intervention? How does it work?

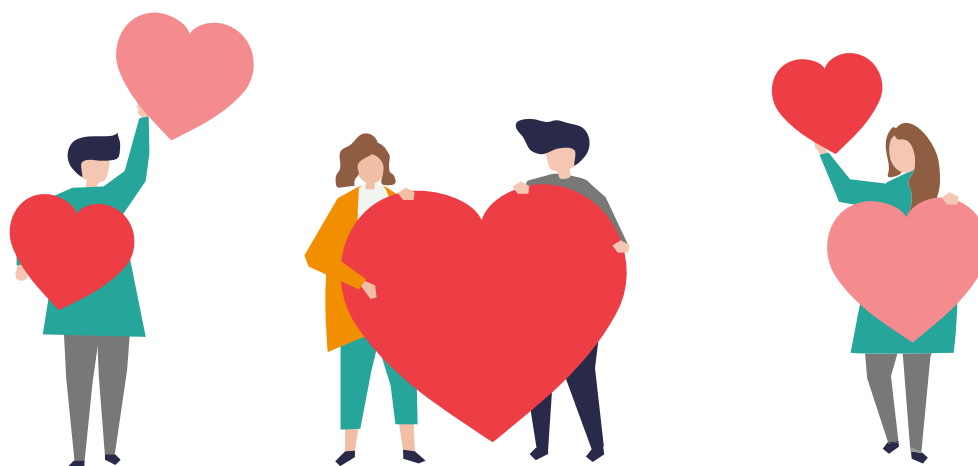
You've probably heard of interventions before, but you may not be familiar with the exact process and the intention behind it. To define the term, an intervention is a collective action organized by friends and family of an individual who may be struggling with a problem – usually addiction – with the purpose of confronting the person with their issue and helping them move past it.

What happens during an intervention?

When an intervention takes place, the addict typically is not aware until it happens. The point is to take them by surprise in order to avoid the opportunity for them to deny, deflect, hide, or run away from the confrontation. An intervention is carefully organized and happens at a predetermined time and place that is agreed upon by all the people involved. The addict is taken by surprise and are encouraged to stay and listen.

The family and the friends involved express their concerns regarding the addict's well-being and their feelings. Everything must be expressed as positively and empathetically as possible. This is not a time for accusatory language or behavior or an airing of grievances. The point of an intervention is to help the person in question realize that they have a problem, that they need help, and to convince them to accept the help that their loved ones are offering.

A successful intervention cannot happen ad-hoc and needs to be carefully planned, including everything from structure, to how the people involved take turns speaking and listening to what they say. Everything that is to be said must be to help the addict, and must be expressed in a way that will not alienate the addict, put them on the defensive, or push them further away.



How to stage an intervention

If you suspect that one of your loved ones is struggling with substance abuse and may benefit from an intervention, there are some steps you can take to organize one.

Step 1 – Identify the probable issue

If you think one of your loved ones has a substance abuse problem, but you are not certain, here are some things that can help you identify the issue. You should also consult the lists of signs of addiction in Chapter 1. In addition, here are some of the things to look out for:

1. You notice an increase in their tolerance

An increase in the amount they use, whether it's alcohol or even something like prescription drugs, can be a strong sign of an addiction in the making. Tolerance increases as the amount one consumes increases. If you have concerns related to how high this amount is, it's worth thinking about an intervention, or at least keeping an eye out for more signs.

2. They are under the influence of substances more often than not

This is an often undeniable sign of addiction; when a person is often under the influence, it becomes a problem. Like we saw in Chapter 1, this will also attract other kinds of unsavory and worrying behavior, such as a general lack of care for anything else, a lapse in self-care, etc. It can even get to the point where this consumption and influence interferes with professional and social situations.

3. They hide evidence of their substance consumption

Someone who has started exhibiting deceptive behavior, particularly related to substance consumption, is at risk. When substance abuse becomes a problem, the addict becomes aware and ashamed, so they start to hide it, start lying to the people around them, etc. Especially if you find receipts, bottles, paraphernalia, or other signs of substance abuse that's been hidden, that's a clear sign.



Step 2 – Decide when and where it should happen

The next thing to decide is who should be present and where it should take place. More often than not, a close friend or family member is the one that suggests an intervention. Then, they can decide who else who's close to the addict may want to attend or whose presence may be helpful they want to invite.

Every person present should have a genuine desire to help. Before organizing, it would be helpful to discuss the situation amongst the people present, listen to everyone's feelings and experiences with the targeted person, and decide whether an intervention is warranted. One very important person to include is an intervention specialist, but we'll address that in the next section.

The place is just as important as the group of people involved, because the addict should be perfectly comfortable and at ease. It should be a safe space for them. The place should also be private, in order to minimize distractions, feelings of embarrassment, of being exposed, of being afraid, and the refusal to speak in a public environment. This is an intimate matter and should be treated accordingly.

The best choices are someone's home (that the addict is familiar with), a church, a professional's office, or even a conference room. Time constraints should also be considered, although there is no time limit on interventions; they can take a few minutes or a few hours.



Step 3 – Find an intervention specialist

One of the most important people in attendance is the intervention specialist, and they should be found and invited before you finalize any details about the intervention. They are the specialist you need and who will know all the steps to take and how to proceed. You can get a recommendation from a medical provider, but you can also look online to source someone. Be aware of the fact that some specialists are better than others, or simply more experienced, and that there may be costs involved, so be prepared and decide who is covering the expenses. The same goes if you are renting a space for your intervention.



Step 4 – Prepare and rehearse

A successful intervention is a structured one and one that is carefully planned. That requires rehearsing, believe it or not. Especially because it involves multiple people and it's such a sensitive issue. You not only need to know exactly in what order to speak and what to say, but you also need the proper tools for this conversation, in order to make it a success.

A breakdown in communication or a mismanaged conversation can make the intervention a failure, so it's extremely important to equip everyone with the proper tools to handle this. This includes having intimate knowledge of the issues the victim is struggling with and ultimately, what pushed them to become addicted to substances.

As far as order goes, it can be a good idea to start out with the person who is closest to the addict. However, it's important to also have people from further out in their social circle. While a [Substance Use and Misuse](#) academic journal reports that most people have interventions organized by family (60%) or romantic partners (56%), it can actually be incredibly helpful for people outside the immediate circle of the addict to weigh in. That is because an addict is likely to have heard from their loved ones before, but hearing from someone who's not as close can be a wake-up call as to the extent of their issue and how obvious it is externally and to others.

A successful intervention should help everyone involved understand addiction better, understand the depth of it, the nature of it, and that it is a disease that can be overcome with the proper help. Rehearsal is important in this case not only because it gives you confidence in what you are articulating, but also because it helps you understand it better. You want your words to be powerful and moving, but full of love and empathy. Your loved one needs understanding.

Step 5 – Maintain an optimistic outlook, but be realistic

An important point to remember here is that you have to be prepared for every outcome. Obviously, the best case scenario is that the addict will experience a breakthrough, will understand their issue and will ask for and accept help from his loved ones.

However, there is also another more negative outcome to consider – that the addict will become defensive (even aggressive), and will sink further into denial about their problem. They will dismiss their loved ones' concerns and reject any help offered. Anger is a very common reaction, even in addicts who end up coming around.

Something most people don't realize is that there is also a middle reaction; an addict who acknowledges they have a problem and that they need help, but is not yet ready to accept help to the extent they really need it.



CHAPTER 6

What To Do In Case Of A Relapse



If you've ever dealt with addiction before, whether first-hand or because of a loved one, you know that not even the point of accepting the problem, seeking treatment, and ceasing using is the end of it. Addiction is extremely difficult to overcome and at times, it overpowers even the most determined of people. Especially as an outsider, frustration is bound to occur when the addict does not just stop using, but it's not that simple. Relapsing is common, especially in the beginning, and must be accepted as almost a given. You or your loved one will relapse, and you have to be equipped to deal with it to the best of your abilities.

Why do relapses occur?

It's essential to view addiction like the chronic disease it is – starting treatment is great, but ongoing treatment is necessary. Professional help will be needed from time to time, and especially in the very beginning when the addict is still coming to terms with the situation and finding their strength and their motivation, there's bound to be moments when they falter.

The necessity for modifying the treatment does not indicate the failure of the addict or of the treatment; it's merely a phase and a temporary setback in a much longer and complex journey that the addict will complete. The act of relapsing simply indicates the need for an adjustment of their treatment in order to reach the ideal treatment that works for the individual and their specific needs.



What are these adjustments? The treatment can be adjusted to include a stay at a rehab or an inpatient treatment facility, or it can also mean a full treatment. Be aware that some relationships may need to be revised if they hinder the recovering addict's progress. Counselling can always help in these situations, because it can help give the individual a sense of control over their own actions.

Ultimately, we have to remember that each person is different and each journey towards recovery will be different. The treatment plan will have to be made taking into account the individual's circumstances, environment, personality, needs, vulnerable points, etc. The crucial thing to know is that the earlier you can recognize the signs, the bigger the chance to get back on the path to recovery.

Here's how to recognize relapse signs

The [Mayo Clinic](#) indicates that these are some of the signs that a loved one may have relapsed. If you pick up on any of these signs, you may want to address a medical professional.

- Paranoia
- Speaking rapidly
- Depression
- Breathing slowly
- Lapses in judgement
- Lethargy
- Slurring
- Being under the influence
- Abandonment of responsibilities
- Lack of appetite
- Weight loss



Remember that not all of these symptoms will appear in all individuals, or they will not all be apparent at the same time. It is possible for one to have relapsed and still maintain the appearance of a regular life. It is up to the people closest to them to determine if the individual in question has fallen back into old habits and are in need of help.

What to do in case of denial and defensiveness

You may find that when you confront your loved one, they deny having started using again and they may be defensive and aggressive about it. Especially if they've been using for a while, the relapse may have been significant and may have undone some of the healthy habits and coping mechanisms the addict has previously learned. Depending on how much progress has been lost, it may be necessary to restart the process from the very beginning in order to obtain results, once again.

If you haven't already planned an intervention, now may be the time to do so. Interventions can be very powerful, because they force the addict to be confronted with their problem and how they are affecting the people around them and to come to terms with their addiction.

A full intervention may not be necessary; a heartfelt letter explaining how they are affecting their loved ones and what the consequences are can be the wake-up call some people need. Addiction can cause one to develop tunnel vision and be unable to think clearly or see anything around them except for their own need for the substance they are craving. Confronting them with the truth may have the desired effect of getting the addict to snap out of it. Consequences can be established in the case of a refusal to go back to treatment.

Another good idea is to confront the addict with the help of a medical professional who was involved in the original treatment or the interventionist who was present for the first intervention, if that was successful. They are already familiar with the case and are the voices of authority and professionalism that the situation may require.

If you are not familiar with any part of the addict's original treatment or the medical professionals that helped, you can always contact any medical professional or a hotline. Please consult Chapter 8 for more information about who can help in this situation, as well as contact details.



The individual has to want to seek help

Remember that you cannot force anyone to get help or change their behavior. It is up to the addict to decide that they want to get better and seek the necessary treatment and help. If they refuse, it is not through any fault on your part. Addiction is not an easy disease to battle, and more often than not, it does not allow us to make the right choices.



CHAPTER 7

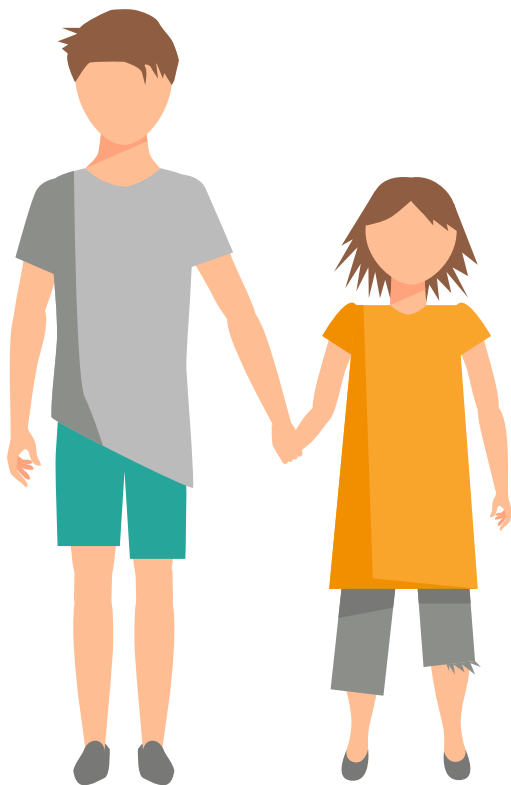
What If You're Genetically Predisposed To Addictive Behavior?



When Addiction Is A Genetic Predisposition

You may find yourself in a somewhat unique position, where you are not and have never been addicted to substances, but you are aware that you are at risk for addictive behavior. Addictive tendencies can certainly be inherited, and at times, these individuals need to work twice as hard to overcome this innate programming, compared to their peers.

Studies have shown that addiction is 50% due to circumstances and the inadequate coping skills that come with, but 50% is down to genetic predisposition. Studies on hundreds of pairs of fraternal and identical twins have demonstrated that with identical twins, if there is a probability of addiction, they both have it, while it is possible for a fraternal twin to be addicted and for the other one to have no increased risk. It is estimated that a person with addict parents are 8 times more likely to exhibit addictive behavior. That is a significant difference, compared to their peers, whose families do not have histories of addiction.



The issue of epigenetics

A child is not only affected by the parents' addictive behavior in utero; one can inherit the predisposition towards substance abuse, and even the abnormal brain development that comes with it. A series of studies were performed on rats – when the parents used cocaine, cortical and hippocampal development was affected in the offspring. Smaller litters with weaker offspring were the result of opioid use. Once was enough to do damage, including to the sperm quality.

Both nicotine and alcohol performed similarly, but they are harder to study because of the presence and prevalence of second-hand smoke. Generational

behavior that can be inherited is certainly a reason for concern, because epigenetics impact the individual on several levels, including behavioral, physiological and molecular.

Did you know that addiction is built into our brain? Both in humans and animals, we have the genetic predisposition in order to allow for the positive associations with foods that we like. We take pleasure in consuming it and will seek it out in the future. That can lead to an “overdose” even in harmless things like foods. Unfortunately, this same allowance can be exploited with harmful substances.

But while we all technically have the potential to become addicted, some people are at a greater risk for it than others. The good news is that just because one is born with a greater risk, it doesn’t mean they will become addicts. The bad news is that people with a low risk for addictive behavior can still end up abusing substances. How can this difference be explained?



The way we change our brains

Unfortunately, while a segment of the population can be born with a genetic disadvantage because of their modified cognitive function due to their parents' addiction, we can also do that damage ourselves through our own behavior. We can make ourselves more likely to use and become addicts.

- **Substance abuse impacts your brain**

Repeated, long-term substance use and abuse impacts your brain in permanent ways. By continuing to use, you essentially “train” your brain and modify its structure (see Chapter 1 where we explain the brain on substances) and end up wanting to use more often and in larger quantities to achieve the same type of effect like you did the first time. You can see how that can easily turn into addiction.

- **You can control your behavior**

Even if you are among the people who are genetically predisposed, you still control the 50% that is due to coping skills. You can overcome this genetic predisposition and live a perfectly balanced life. But how can you make sure you avoid the pitfalls of your predecessors' struggles?



How To Take Control Of Your Genetic Predisposition And Avoid Addiction

Get to know your family history

You may not know that much about whether or not you have a family history of addiction. This may be because of several factors:

- Family members genuinely don't know others struggled with addiction
- People were less educated about addiction in the past and may not have had the knowledge and tools to recognize it or label it
- Addiction present in the family was downplayed, undermined, or misunderstood
- People are ashamed of the history of addiction in the family
- People consider it a private matter and don't think it's relevant to anyone else

However, getting to know your family history is the first step, because it's important information, and knowledge that you have a right to. A history of addiction is just like a history of any other type of illness in the family that may be genetically transmitted. We cannot stress enough how important this information is.

You should start with your parents and asking them about their medical past and what they struggled with. Moreover, take a look at their habits surrounding substances – do they drink? Do they smoke? Have they ever used drugs? Is either of them sober? Do you have reasons to believe that either of them has a substance abuse problem or may have had one in the past? If they don't offer the answers you are looking for, don't hesitate to ask around in your family and try to uncover the truth. Remember that this is your medical information as well.



Stories of uncles who “liked the bottle” or any other euphemisms are relevant and are not to be dismissed. Just because this serious issue was misunderstood in the past doesn’t mean it didn’t have (and still does have) very real effects.

What is more, you can lead by example. If you have struggled or are struggling with addiction or substance use in general, you can be the change that is necessary in your circle. Be the one who admits that they have a problem and how you are dealing with it in a healthy way. That may inspire others to admit their own struggles and seek help. Teach your children the same things you are learning, make use of the coping mechanisms discussed in the previous chapters, and teach them how to do the same.

Cross Addiction Awareness

One of the most important aspects of having a genetic predisposition to addiction is being aware of the fact that it does not matter what your family members were addicted to; you can still develop an addiction to any other substance. Addiction is not individual and specific to the substance; it’s all hardwired the same way in the brain.

That means that while your family members may have abused opioids, you could become an alcoholic, or the other way around. You aren’t predisposed to a certain kind of addiction, but to addictive behavior, in general. An important thing to signal here is that some addictions are unrecognized or fly under the radar especially in the case of women. Pain medication addiction, eating disorders, or even tranquilizer addictions are just as valid as an alcohol or cocaine addiction.



Another very important point to make is that even if you've been abstaining from the substance you were addicted to, a different drug can make you relapse. Here is how cross addiction leads to relapse:

- Because addiction functions the same, in the same area of the brain, there is virtually no differentiation between them. Any substance will activate this part of the brain, whether it's an old one or a new one. Once it's activated, you will crave the substance you used to be addicted to.
- Even substances that are socially acceptable or comparatively less harmful, consumed in moderation (such as marijuana or alcohol) can contribute to a relapse, because your inhibitions are lowered and it becomes much more difficult to make healthy choices. Your thinking can never be impaired, once you're in recovery.
- Switching to a "lesser" substance like marijuana, alcohol, nicotine, etc. is ultimately not an effort towards sobriety, because you are not putting the healthy coping skills you've learned to good use. If you are serious about getting sober, you must give up all substance use, however moderate.





CHAPTER 8

Where You Can Get Help

We've been talking about getting professional help, seeking medical attention, or calling a professional, but where do you get started? Where can you find some good resources if you or a loved one need help getting started with substance abuse treatment? Luckily, there are a lot of places that can help people in need with their journey towards recovery: rehab facilities, medical institutions, non-profits, hotlines, etc.

Any of the places we talk about here would be willing to help and will provide the best care possible to anyone who is in need of their services. The one you choose is up to you, your location, your preferences, etc. Remember that the important part is that you get the help you need; the exact location matters less. Making that first step and asking for help or accepting the help that is offered to you is difficult, but it's the most important step in your journey towards recovery.



Addiction Resource

Web: <https://addictionresource.com/>

Hotline: (844)-220-3370

Self-help resources online:

Sometimes, the easiest thing is to seek help online. If you are an addict in need of help and support, here are some resources that can help you get started and that will offer you support from fellow recovering and former addicts.

- [NA Chat](#)
- [Soberistas](#)
- [12 Step Forums](#)
- [Quit Smoking Support](#)
- [AA Intergroup](#)
- [Support Groups](#)
- [12 Step Forums](#)
- [Addiction Survivors](#)
- [Recovery Zone](#)

Friends and Family resources

Family and friends of addicts also need support and care, so if you are currently supporting an addict, remember to also take care of yourself. Here are some good resources for support networks:

- [Nar-anon](#)
- [Al-Anon.org](#)
- [S-Anon](#)
- [Adultchildren.org](#)
- [Gam-anon](#)
- [Coda.org](#)

Addiction treatment programs

If you are looking for addiction treatment programs, but don't know where to start, here are some good objective government websites that have lists of the best treatment centers in the country.

- <https://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov>
- <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

Government agencies for addiction recovery

Government agencies for addiction recovery are always unbiased, so if you are having trouble finding a treatment center that suits your needs, it can be a good idea to check out the government ones.

- [Smoke Free](#)
- [National Institute of Drug Abuse](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration](#)

12-step programs

12-step programs are not suited to everyone's needs, but if it sounds like something that may motivate you to overcome your problem, it's worth taking a look. The advantage is that there are

very many such organizations (even secular ones) tailored to the addict's specific problem, whether that's nicotine, alcohol, food, specific drugs, etc.

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
- 12 Steps
- Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA)
- Food Compulsions Anonymous
- Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA)
- Women for Sobriety (WFS)
- Cocaine Anonymous (CA)
- LifeRing Secular Recovery
- Marijuana Anonymous
- XA Speakers
- Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA)
- Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA)

- Sexaholics Anonymous
- Gamblers Anonymous (GA)
- Nicotine Anonymous
- Smart Recovery

Organizations for addiction recovery

Addiction recovery organizations can always help you with information, recommendations, advice, etc.

- American Lung Association
- Addiction Recovery Guide
- 12StepTreatmentCenters.com
- Off The Wagon
- American Society of Addiction Medicine
- Partnership For Drug Free America
- Helping Others Live Sober

About Addiction Resource

Addiction Resource was founded in 2014 to provide a place for those recovering from addiction and to help patients find the highest quality care for a successful recovery. We are not a treatment center and does not accept payments or advertising offers. Instead, we work to provide free resources to help people better understand their addiction and motivate them to make the first step in seeking support.

Our Philosophy on Addiction Recovery

We have a duty to improve the healthcare situation for the public, and the path we have chosen in this regard is one that has to deal with one of the biggest problems that the helthcare industry faces.

Addiction is a condition that many people are living with and are struggling to recover from, either due to denial of the situation or a general lack of knowledge about the proper way to go about it. Our approach is to provide safe and effective care of the highest quality and value for these people in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Our Mission

Our goal is to provide resources to help patients and their loved ones to stay on the road to recovery and successfully overcome addiction for life. We believe in our ability to help improve others' lives, and belief is what motivates us to educate and support our readers every day.

Our Accreditations and Memberships

We are also members of organizations dedicated to addiction treatment. This shows our commitment to providing our staff and clients with up-to-date, evidence-based information about addiction treatment. It also helps to ensure that we always implement the best practices for addiction treatment while adhering to the high standards set for addiction treatment. Our list of accreditations and memberships include:

