

What is addiction?

Addiction is a psychological and physical inability to stop consuming a chemical, drug, activity, or substance, even though it is causing psychological and physical harm.

The term *addiction* does not only refer to dependence on substances such as heroin or cocaine. A person who cannot stop taking a particular drug or chemical has a substance dependence.

Some addictions also involve an inability to stop partaking in activities, such as gambling, eating, or working. In these circumstances, a person has a behavioral addiction.

Addiction is a chronic disease that can also result from taking medications. The overuse of prescribed opioid painkillers, for example, causes 115 deaths every day in the United States.

When a person experiences addiction, they cannot control how they use a substance or partake in an activity, and they become dependent on it to cope with daily life.

Every year, addiction to alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, and prescription opioids costs the U.S. economy upward of \$740 billion in treatment costs, lost work, and the effects of crime.

Most people start using a drug or first engage in an activity voluntarily. However, addiction can take over and reduce self-control.

Addiction vs Misuse

Drug addiction and drug misuse are different.

Misuse refers to the incorrect, excessive, or non-therapeutic use of body- and mind-altering substances.

However, not everybody that misuses a substance has an addiction. Addiction is the long-term inability to moderate or cease intake.

For example, a person who drinks alcohol heavily on a night out may experience both the euphoric and harmful effects of the substance.

However, this does not qualify as an addiction until the person feels the need to consume this amount of alcohol regularly, alone, or at times of day when the alcohol will likely impair regular activities, such as in the morning.

A person who has not yet developed an addiction may be put off further use by the harmful side effects of substance abuse. For example, vomiting or waking up with a hangover after drinking too much alcohol may deter some people from drinking that amount anytime soon.

Someone with an addiction will continue to misuse the substance in spite of the harmful effects.

Symptoms

The primary indications of addiction are:

- uncontrollably seeking drugs
- uncontrollably engaging in harmful levels of habit-forming behavior
- neglecting or losing interest in activities that do not involve the harmful substance or behavior
- relationship difficulties, which often involve lashing out at people who identify the dependency
- an inability to stop using a drug, though it may be causing health problems or personal problems, such as issues with employment or relationships
- hiding substances or behaviors and otherwise exercising secrecy, for example, by refusing to explain injuries that occurred while under the influence
- profound changes in appearance, including a noticeable abandonment of hygiene
- increased risk-taking, both to access the substance or activity and while using it or engaging in it

Withdrawal

When a person has an addiction, and they stop taking the substance or engaging in the behavior, they may experience certain symptoms.

These symptoms include:

- anxiety
- irritability
- tremors and shaking
- nausea
- vomiting
- fatigue (tiredness)
- a loss of appetite

If a person has regularly used alcohol or benzodiazepines, and they stop suddenly or without medical supervision, withdrawal can be fatal.

Treatments

Medicinal advances and progress in diagnosing have helped the medical community develop various ways to manage and resolve addiction.

Methods include:

- behavioral therapy and counseling
- medication and drug-based treatment
- medical devices to treat withdrawal
- treating related psychological factors, such as depression
- ongoing care to reduce the risk of relapse

Addiction treatment is highly personalized and often requires the support of the individual's community or family.

Treatment can take a long time and may be complicated. Addiction is a chronic condition with a range of psychological and physical effects. Each substance or behavior may require different management.

Take Away

Addiction is a serious, chronic dependence on a substance or activity. A person with an addiction is unable to stop taking a substance or engaging in a behavior, though it has harmful effects on daily living.

Misuse is different from addiction. Substance misuse does not always lead to addiction, while addiction involves regular misuse of substances or engagement in harmful behavior.

Symptoms of addiction often include declining physical health, irritation, fatigue, and an inability to cease using a substance or engaging in a behavior. Addiction can lead to behavior that strains relationships and inhibits daily activities.

Ceasing to use the substance or engage in the behavior often leads to withdrawal symptoms, including nausea and shaking. Do not attempt to suddenly stop using alcohol or benzodiazepines without medical supervision.

Addiction treatment can be difficult, but it is effective. The best form of treatment depends on the substance and the presentation of the addiction, which varies from person to person. However, treatment often involves counseling, medication, and community support

If you believe that you or a loved one is suffering from addiction please call your local hotline and support numbers.

Additional Helpful Resources

The following hotline numbers are presented here as additional helpful resources. If you are facing an immediate crisis, please call emergency services at 911.

- **Boys Town National Hotline**
- 1 (800) 448-3000
- Crisis and resource line staffed by counselors to provide information about a variety of issues, including chemical dependency.
- **Covenant House Teen Hotline (NineLine)**
- 1 (800) 999-9999
- General hotline for adolescents, teens and their families. Assistance with any kind of problem—including alcohol and drug use. Covenant House specializes in homeless and runaway youth.
- **National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)**
- 1 (800) NCA-CALL (622-2255)
- NCADD's HOPE LINE directs callers to numerous affiliate programs around the country to assist, at a local level, with substance use issues.
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)**
- 1 (800) 662-HELP (4357)
- National agency dedicated to prevention of drug use, and treatment of existing drug problems. You can get around-the-clock help in finding local drug treatment centers.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline**
- 1 (800) 662-HELP (4357)
- 1 (800) 487-4889 (TDD) for hearing impaired
- Confidential information service for individuals and family members faced with substance use disorders and/or mental health issues. Information available in English and Spanish.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
- 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255)
- Not just a suicide hotline, this lifeline offers help with issues of drug and alcohol use.
- **Partnership for Drug-Free Kids**
- 1 (855) DRUG-FREE (378-4373)
- While not a crisis line, this hotline provides information to parents about adolescent and teen drug use, prevention, and treatment.

Websites used for information

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323465>

<https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/>

<https://drugabuse.com/addiction/drug-abuse-hotlines/>