
Addiction

Summary

- Addiction is when you feel an uncontrollable need use a substance or repeat a behaviour that is harmful to you.
 - Addiction can be either physical or psychological, or both.
 - Having an addiction can have a negative impact on you and your family and friends.
 - If you think you have an addiction, please seek help.
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Addiction is when you feel an uncontrollable need to use a substance (such as alcohol) or repeat a behaviour (such as gambling) that is harmful to you. Addiction can be either physical or psychological. When you are addicted to something you do not have full control over your actions.

Physical addiction is when your body depends on a particular substance or behaviour. Your body becomes more tolerant of the substance or behaviour over time, which means you take (or do) more and more to feel the effects. If you try to give up, your body may react with withdrawal symptoms.

Psychological addiction is when you have an emotional or psychological desire for a substance or behaviour. If you try to give up, you may feel depressed, anxious and unable to sleep or concentrate.

Types of addiction

There are many types of addiction. You may have a dependence on a substance, such as alcohol, nicotine or heroin. But you can also be addicted to behaviours such as work, gambling, exercise, shopping, sex, eating, online gaming and risk taking. These are known as compulsive behaviours.

Addiction affects your physical and mental health, and it may come to affect all areas of your life. As dependency on a substance or behaviour grows, satisfying your cravings for it can become more important to you than other activities. If you have an addiction, whatever it is, it's best to get immediate professional help.

How addiction is different from substance abuse

When someone starts to use drugs, it's called substance use. But substance use can lead to dependency. A person is considered to be dependent or addicted when they feel they must have the drug, whether they want it or not. There is no safe level of drug use.

How addiction can happen

Addiction is complicated and can develop as a result of many factors.

The use of a substance may make you feel great, so you may want to use it again. The first time you use a drug is often the strongest experience. The psychological, social and physical elements of addiction take longer to develop.

Some substances are more addictive than others. You may become addicted after using methamphetamine or heroin just a handful of times.

Some people may be more at risk of addiction due to:

- genes – you may be biologically prone to addiction
 - environmental factors, such as being brought up by someone with an addiction
 - a desire to relax
 - a desire to block out difficult issues
 - a desire to achieve peak physical or mental performance
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- trauma or stress
- pressure at work
- relationship breakdown
- unemployment
- poverty
- socioeconomic, ethnic or racial marginalisation.

Addiction can happen at any stage of life, and to anyone. If you think you have an addiction, then part of overcoming it is understanding why you became addicted. What biological, social and mental factors have contributed? Working through your addiction with a health professional, such as a doctor or a counsellor, may help you understand why you became addicted.

Symptoms of addiction

Some of the more common signs of addiction are if you:

- think you need the substance or behaviour to forget your problems, to cope with your life, or to relax
- withdraw from family and friends
- don't care about your work or schoolwork, and your performance has become worse (possibly a lot)
- aren't interested in your usual interests and hobbies
- are stealing or selling things to pay for your addiction
- tried to quit but you can't
- feel shaky or sick when you try to quit
- feel anxious, angry or depressed most of the time
- are having trouble sleeping, or can't stop sleeping
- are eating differently from your usual eating patterns
- have gained or lost a fair amount of weight
- have become unreliable, often turning up late or not at all
- have started high-risk behaviour such as having unprotected casual sex, drink driving, using dirty needles, leaving home or quitting your job
- are arguing a lot, or being aggressive, with family, friends or work colleagues
- are keeping secrets from the people who care about you
- have new friends who have the same addiction, or who support your addiction (such as suppliers of drugs).

What addiction does to you

Addiction to either a substance or a behaviour can have a huge negative impact on your life, and the lives of the people around you. It will almost certainly cause harm to you and possibly to others.

Addiction can have short-term impacts, such as problems with your:

- physical health – nausea, aches and pains, sleep problems, weight gain or loss, infections, accidents, illness or chronic disease
- mental health – depression, anxiety, paranoia, psychosis
- personal relationships
- study, work and money
- behaviour – criminal behaviour, anti-social behaviour, isolation.

Addiction can even lead to suicide or accidental death.

Getting help for addiction

Accepting that you have an addiction can be difficult. So can asking for help.

If you think you have an addiction, you may want to tell someone you trust. You may feel comfortable letting a family member, friend, teacher, religious leader or work colleague know.

If you are not ready for advice, let them know. It's also a good idea to visit your doctor.

There are many organisations that can help you by offering counselling, rehabilitation programs, self-help programs and support.

Where to get help

DirectLine - confidential alcohol and drug counselling and referral in Victoria, Tel. 1800 888 236

Family Drug Help - information and support for people concerned about a relative or friend using drugs, Tel. 1300 660 068

Kids Helpline - private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25, Tel. 1800 55 1800

Lifeline - 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services, Tel. 13 11 14

ReachOut - online mental health organisation for young people and their parents

eheadspace - online and telephone support and counselling for young people aged 12 to 25 and their family and friends, Tel. 1800 650 890

Alcohol and Drug Foundation - list of help and support services in Australia, Tel. 1300 858 584

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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