How Self-Medicating Often Leads to Addiction

by NEWLIFEOUTLOOK TEAM

Addiction and Self-Medicating

One of the most important aspects of treating addiction is to discover whether any underlying mental or physical conditions contribute to the use of drugs and alcohol. Self-medicating is a term that refers to the use of drugs and alcohol to treat a condition that is typically treated in a medical or therapeutic setting. For instance, someone with depression may abuse drugs to feel better about themselves or their life in general.

Trauma and Addiction

Self-medicating may be more common for those who have experienced a traumatic event, according to psychologists. Trauma can include any situation where there was an emergency, loss or abuse, whether physical or mental, present.

Losing a parent at an early age is one example of trauma that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is an important aspect of the self-medication theory for some psychology experts since it is thought that the development of PTSD can be linked to addiction.

Traumatic events in early life have been linked to an increase in alcoholism and an increase in IV drug use. While addiction is very complex and difficult to understand completely, some scientists believe that the brain's response to trauma and the resulting PTSD is responsible, at least in part, for addiction.

After a traumatic experience, the amygdala begins to work overtime in response to the event. This increased activity may continue long after the event, even when there is no threat in the foreseeable future which may trigger the cycle of addiction.

Substance abuse is higher among those who have experienced a traumatic experience, but some rely on alcohol and drugs as a response to an existing condition that isn't related to trauma or PTSD.

Addiction and Mental Disorders

Depression and ADHD are two different types of mental disorders that have both been linked to self-medicating. Drugs and alcohol can change the way you experience emotions.

The positive effect of drug use may be one important aspect of self-medicating because of an existing mental disorder with symptoms that include apathy or lack of motivation.

Drugs and alcohol may improve mood or cause mental alertness that isn't present while sober. The enhanced emotions and mental state may be one reason that people with mental disorders turn to drugs and alcohol.

Addiction can take many forms. Addiction to food or gambling may take the place of drugs and alcohol for some

people.

The basis of addiction is yet to be identified and some people may begin to self-medicate for hidden reasons. For instance, some people don't feel satisfied with the same types of rewards that other people find satisfying. This can cause people to seek other ways to stimulate the reward center of the brain.

Smoking cigarettes is another form of addiction that is used to calm anxieties and produce feelings of well-being. Self-medicating is a spiral that begins with increasing positive feelings but results in poor health and, in those with mental disorders, more pronounced symptoms.