What Are the Risk Factors of Addiction?

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Risk Factors for Substance Abuse

Have you wondered why some people become addicted to drugs while others don't? Because addictions are closely related to your vulnerability to become addicted to alcohol, cigarettes or drugs, which involves a combination of genetics, psychological and environmental factors. Below is an examination of each of these risk factors for addiction.

Genes

Our genetic makeup may help predict the risk of getting an addiction.

In fact, some genes correlate with multiple addictions as indicated by a team of researchers in a 2009 study featured in "Nature Review Genetics." The troubled genes are found on 11 chromosomes where addictions for alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, nicotine and opioid drugs are clustered together.

Another study in 2008 by Plos Computational Biology, found 1,500 human addiction-related genes had been identified after reviewing numerous scientific papers.

Understanding the genetics behind vulnerability help doctors to create in the future more personalized treatment plans, according to your genetic makeup. Remember, genes may predispose you, but you are not predestined to have addictive behavior. You just have to be more careful to avoid the addiction trap.

Environmental

Considered one of the more important environmental factors that affect the risk of alcohol or drug abuse is religion. Based on research studies, strong religious beliefs significantly decrease the risk for alcohol addiction while few studies also show that religious beliefs help to abstain from drug addictions as well.

Poor parental practices (i.e. child abuse, neglect) have been linked with vulnerability to develop addictions while warm but authoritative parenting helps prevent them. The old saying that you are the average sum of your best five friends is also true when we talk about addictions. Peers have a strong influence, particularly in teenagers. Just like with parents, siblings and colleagues can protect or increase the risk of alcohol or drug dependence.

Laws and regulations made addictive substances either expensive (for example, alcohol and cigarettes) or hard to obtain (for example, illicit drugs) – thus they protect you by limiting your exposure to addictive substances.

Again, there are things you can do. If you suffered from physical or emotional abuse as a child, you can see a psychotherapist to help you deal with old, negative emotions. If your friends have addictions, you may want to get to know new friends who have healthy habits.

Choose your environment wisely to prevent vulnerability to addictions.

Psychological factors

Stress plays a major role in the development of addiction as well as relapse vulnerability. Scientists now can explain how these two are connected.

For example, early life stress (i.e. child abuse) will affect the hormones, including the corticotrophin-releasing factors and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. Chemical substances in the brain for example dopamine, glutamate and GABA are also influenced by stress and are involved in addiction.

Anxiety and depression increase the risk of addiction as well. In fact, they may predict the first incidence of alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence, according to a 2013 study featured in “The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry.” These findings are important for clinicians because a prevention program can be initiated at the time of the diagnosis of these mood disorders.

Again, psychological factors may increase your chances to be vulnerable to addictions but that doesn’t mean that you will develop these addictions for sure. Psychotherapists and doctors can help you manage these emotional troubles. Help is available, just be aware that you have options to choose from to stay clean and drug-free.