How to Overcome and Beat Your Addiction

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Strategies for Overcoming Addiction

There are no good addictions. Addictions are never helpful, beneficial, or productive and addictions only leave a trail of damaged health, finances, and relationships behind, which is why we are going to talk about strategies to overcoming addiction.

Addictions are common, though. More than 20 million people in the U.S. have a substance use disorder (a term sometimes used instead of addiction) to one or more substances.

Since addictions are devastating and affect many, it is understandable that people desperately seek ways to end their addiction and substance use each day. If only they could return to a life without addiction, their happiness and fulfillment would improve.

Overcoming addiction is an intricate process that requires patience and tremendous amounts of energy. Recovery from substance abuse is possible. Here's how to achieve your goals:

Recognize the Problem

Only by seeing the full impact of drugs, alcohol, and addiction on your life can you begin the process of recovery. Recognizing the problem is quite complicated because addiction uses tools like denial and misguided anger to ignore the issue or pass the blame on somebody else.

If you are considering the idea that your substance use has become a problem, consult with a trusted friend or family member and ask questions like:

- Do I use drugs and alcohol more often or in greater amounts than I intend?
- Do I spend a lot of time getting, using, and recovering from use?
- Are people worried about my use?
- Have I tried to quit or reduce my substance use without success?
- Do I have strong desires to be using the substance?
- Have I struggled to meet expectations at home, work, or school due to drugs?
- Do I feel uncomfortable or unwell when I am not using the substance?
- Am I spending more time fighting with loved ones or isolating myself?
- Do I need more of the substance to feel the desired effects?
- Do I keep using even though negative events have happened or are likely to happen in the future?

Answering "yes" to any of these questions indicates a problem with your substance use. This realization may shock you, but it is important to accept your situation rather than deny it.

Although substances like drugs and alcohol have been the focus to this point, it is important to note that

nonsubstance addictions are possible. Shopping, gambling, and internet or internet gaming are just a few behaviors which could result in addictions.

Note Your Motivators

So you have a problem abusing substances. The next mystery to solve is: Why do you have a problem?

This question is hugely important because if you simply start employing random strategies to improve your condition, you could make no progress or make matters worse.

Several issues lead to substance use, just as several issues can lead to a computer not working properly. Only by accurately identifying the source of the problem can you improve the situation.

There are four general reasons why people begin using substances. They are:

- **To feel good.** This is the most obvious. People want to use drugs for the feelings of euphoria and happiness they produce.
- **To feel better.** People who want to feel better do not use substances to get “high.” They use substances to treat their current state. Sometimes called self-medication, this person will use drugs and alcohol to manage symptoms related to a diagnosed or undiagnosed mental or physical health condition.
- **To perform better.** Using drugs to boost your performance is not only for professional athletes. People will consume substances to improve their academic, social, or physical abilities depending on their situation and stressors.
- **To fit in/experiment.** People usually do not intend to become addicted when they first use. Instead, the goal of substance abuse is to fit in with their social network or as an experiment to experience the effects of the substance.

Which explanation fits your situation the best? Keep in mind that someone can have multiple motivators for using substances so that it might be some combination of all four.

Treat the Underlying Conditions

Now that you have some information about your motivations for substance use, you can begin to act on it. By treating these drives, you can target the source of your addiction rather than the symptoms.

The presence of a mental health condition is a great example here. Mental health disorders are common in people who use substances, and substance abuse is very common among people with mental health disorders, which makes self-medication likely.

For the 8 million people with both a mental health condition and a substance use disorder, substance abuse treatment will not be enough to produce a healthy, happy life. One of the best strategies to overcome addiction is by treating the whole person, not only the addiction.

Any mental health condition can result in substance use. The most common culprits are:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

For someone with depression, substance use becomes their coping skill to manage unwanted symptoms of depression. The coping skill is a negative coping skill but a coping skill nonetheless.

Negative coping skills are easily identifiable by their ability to produce instant gratification with long-term

complications. With time, negative coping skills replace all healthy, positive coping skills because they seem to work so well.

When recovery from substance use begins, you are left with a serious issue. Not only are you managing the complications from ending an addiction, but you also have to manage your depression for the first time without the negative coping skill.

Addressing depression directly means building healthy coping skills, which can be a challenging and uncomfortable process. The process is advisable despite the discomfort as the positive coping skills will lead to the long-lasting well-being you seek.

Positive coping skills for managing mental health issues include:

- Talking to trusted friends and family about your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Journaling your experiences to document your struggles
- Engaging in artistic outlets creating or consuming art, music, or other mediums
- Caring for your physical health by eating good foods, exercising, and getting plenty of rest

As always, you should consult with a professional mental health clinician if your symptoms feel overwhelming or have not improved despite your efforts.

Manage Triggers and Cravings

Early in recovery, you will be inundated with triggers. “Triggers” is a term used to describe the things that spark cravings, which are the strong desire to obtain and consume your drug of choice.

To begin overcoming addiction on your own, you must be familiar with your triggers and the impact of your cravings. People who are exposed to many triggers will have a harder time maintaining abstinence.

Depending on your history of use, triggers could be almost anyone or anything. Triggers are commonly separated into people, places, and things which encourage substance use.

A great coping skill to deal with triggers is to create an exhaustive list of what people, places, and things bring out your desire to use. You may track offenders like:

- **People:** friends, family members, your boss, co-workers, people you used with, teachers, and others
- **Places:** where you used the substance, where you obtain the drug, stressful locations, locations associated with parties or celebrations
- **Things:** drug paraphernalia, birthdays, anniversaries, deaths, births, sporting events, holidays, seasons, specific activities

By creating a list, you can begin to employ one of the most effective ways to cope with triggers in recovery: avoidance. Avoidance allows you to sidestep your triggers before they can create cravings simply. With no cravings, recovery will be easier to attain.

Of course, avoidance has its limitation. You will never be able to avoid all triggers, and some triggers should not be avoided because their benefits outweigh the drawbacks.

Avoiding your boss could result in you being fired and avoiding your family members could cut you off from valuable resources. Remember that avoidance is a healthy coping skill when used in moderation. Too much avoidance becomes negative.

Since you cannot avoid all triggers, it can be helpful for you to think of ways to break the association between the trigger and substance use. Instead of drinking at the bar after work, you can meet some friends at the gym to get a quick workout in.

Withdrawal Triggers

The early stages of recovery from addiction are extremely stressful and dangerous. One reason for this is withdrawal triggers.

Whereas people, place, and thing triggers are learned through their association with substance use, withdrawal triggers are unavoidable, biological triggers. These triggers produce strong and persistent cravings for your drug of choice.

Withdrawal triggers arise when use stops due to physical dependence, which is the state of your brain adapting to the availability of the substance. When the substance is no longer present, the brain yearns for more.

Withdrawal occurs after steady use of:

- Alcohol
- Opioids
- Heroin
- Prescription pain medications
- Marijuana
- Stimulants
- Cocaine
- Methamphetamine/crystal meth
- Prescription stimulant medications for ADHD
- Sleeping medications
- Anti-anxiety medications

Recall the Risks

Sobriety does not instantaneously guarantee a perfect life, so recalling the risks of addiction is a beneficial tool during any stage of recovery. The chances are at during your addiction; you engaged in a series of dangerous behaviors threatening:

- Mental health
- Social health
- Physical health
- Your freedoms
- The lives of people you care about

Perhaps the most profound risk of addiction is death from overdose. Overdose deaths may occur at any stage of addiction, but it can be most deadly early in recovery.

The risk comes from changing tolerance levels. Tolerance is the body’s ability to adapt to the substance in the body over time.

Eventually, you need more of the substance more often to achieve your desired effects. Instead of one pill relieving your pain or getting you high, you now need four because of your growing tolerance.

Once you end use, your tolerance begins to shrink back to its original levels. If you relapse by taking a high dose, the drug will overwhelm your tolerance, which could result in death.

Create a Balanced Life

Avoiding triggers and recalling the risks of addiction are important, but you need more to achieve a long-term, drug-free lifestyle. You need a life with balance.

To move towards a balanced life, you need to complete a comprehensive review of your current state. Consider your:

- Mental health
- Physical health
- Social health
- Legal status
- Financial state
- Employment/ educational needs
- Family relationships
- Housing

Because addiction is such a major concern, you may place disproportional amounts of time and effort improving that facet of your life. In actuality, you need to distribute your energies across each aspect of your life to establish success and happiness.

It won't matter how well your physical health is if you struggle with your mental health. It will not matter how nice your house is if you are incarcerated for legal issues.

Balance is a difficult position to achieve, especially for people with addiction histories, but it is possible. Set goals for each part of your life weekly, and reflect on which areas need a boost.

When you are struggling, let other people know. Your trusted supports will be there to offer feedback and assistance in your mission because your recovery will benefit them in the future.

Some of the best coping skill activities for substance abuse will have nothing to do with substance abuse. Reading a good book, going back to school, having a heartfelt conversation, and going for a walk are some of the best tools for recovery you can participate in.

Accept and Prevent Relapses

Relapses are part of recovery, and just because you relapse does not mean the addiction strategies you used were worthless. It only means you need to reinvest in your recovery.

Not all relapses can be prevented, but composing a relapse prevention plan is a tool which may extend your recovery. Relapse prevention plans are written documents that contain:

- **Your triggers:** thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to substance use
- **An action plan for when you experience cravings:** people to call, places to go, alternative activities to engage in

Once you construct your relapse prevention plan, share it with all of your support, so they can identify your symptoms worsening. Then, everyone can act in a unified way to maintain your recovery.

Seek Professional Assistance When Needed

You can overcome addiction on your own just as you could saw down a tree with a butter knife, but wouldn't the process be better if someone with a chainsaw helped? Professional addiction and mental health specialists bring a chainsaw to the tree.

With their education and experience, professionals can streamline your recovery by:

- Assessing and evaluating your condition
- Teaching you about your addiction
- Recognizing and treating the underlying motivators

- Prescribing medications to reduce cravings
- Developing relapse prevention plans

Not everyone will need professional treatment, but it is a valuable tool to utilize as needed.