What Does Addiction Recovery Mean?

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What Does It Mean to Be in Recovery From Addiction?

Addiction does all it can to stand between you and your happiness. When addiction is in place, all of your experiences are marked by sadness, anger, shame and fear.

If addiction is the problem, addiction recovery is the solution. Recovery is a long and strenuous journey as you pull yourself up from a low position, but the journey is always essential.

Because recovery is an extremely individualized process, the addiction recovery methods one person employs may differ from the methods best for you. Fortunately, many programs share similar features, objectives and goals allowing commonalities to present.

Start by Understanding the Issues

Addiction may sound like a simple and straightforward concept, but the topic is quite intricate with multiple terms and languages used to combine and separate various conditions.

No matter what path to addiction recovery you pursue, the early stages usually begin with gaining a better understanding of substance abuse issues and how they affect your life and well-being.

Are You Addicted to Substances?

What is an addiction? How can you tell if you are addicted if you don’t even know what it means to be addicted?

Having an addiction means your daily focus, effort, and motivations are aimed at getting and using your substance of choice. You will continue on this path in an obsessive way even if very negative or dangerous outcomes are likely.

Addictions usually apply to substances like drugs and alcohol, but new ways of thinking believe people can be addicted to specific behaviors like gambling, shopping and spending time online. Rather than a strong desire for the substance, these people feel compelled to play blackjack, buy things and log onto their favorite online video game or constantly engaged in social media apps.

Some groups avoid using the word addiction, and instead, they use the phrase substance use disorder to better label the condition. You can identify a substance use disorder by their signs and symptoms including:

- Using a substance for long periods of time or in larger amounts than intended.
- The strong desire to cut down, manage, or end use without success.
- Spending significant amounts of time trying to get, use, or recovery from the effects of the substance.
- Having strong urges (cravings) for the substance when none is available.

- Failing to meet your expectations at home, work, or school because you are too focused on or influenced by the substance.
- Use continues even when it damages your relationships with family and friends.
- You give up the social activities you previously enjoyed and choose to spend more time using.
- Use continues even when you know it could result in serious mental health or physical health injury.

The American Psychiatric Association requires two or more of these symptoms in a 12-month period to qualify as a substance use disorder, but only one symptom could indicate a new or worsening problem leading to addiction.

Are You Dependent on Substances?

With substance abuse, addiction is a significant concern, but physical dependence can be just as serious. Physical dependence means you have become so used to the substance, your body needs it to feel well and functioning normally.

Physical dependence is closely tied to tolerance, the process of your body needing more of a substance to produce the wanted effects. Before you could notice the effects of a single beer, but now you need a six-pack to feel buzzed because of your growing tolerance for alcohol.

If you do not feel well without your substance, you might be dependent on it. Dependency and addiction are found together frequently but can exist independently like in the case of prescribed medication. You can take medication as prescribed for several months and build a dependence on it without being addicted to it.

The Risks of Withdrawal

The issue making physical dependence so important is withdrawal. At times, the only way to know if someone is dependent on a substance is to observe them when use ends.

People who are physically dependent will experience many physical and psychological symptoms called withdrawal when use stops. Withdrawal symptoms can be mildly distressing for some and very dangerous for others depending on the type of substance, frequency, dosage and duration of use.

Overwhelming cravings for the substance are common during withdrawal, which can pressure them to restart and continue use. The cycle of addiction, dependence and withdrawal is challenging to break.

By knowing what to expect during addiction, dependence and withdrawal, you gain power and control over your situation. This is why understanding your state will help you recover from addiction.

Addiction Treatment Begins With Assessment

Looking inward at your thoughts, feelings and behaviors regarding addiction is a complicated process as well. Dependence skews your perceptions, so you believe only you are correct, and the others around you are wrong.

Having faulty points-of-view distorts the way you view your addiction. Additionally, it can prevent you from recognizing your addiction at all.

In situations like this, a thorough assessment performed by a knowledgeable mental health or addiction professional can offer a better understanding of your condition. A formal evaluation will diagnosis your status as well as outline possible risks and benefits of ending use and beginning treatment.

The best evaluations are comprehensive, which means they account for all aspects of your life affecting addiction. A detailed assessment will inspect your:

- Mental health symptoms.
- Substance abuse.

- Employment and educational status.
- Medical/physical health symptoms.
- Legal involvement.
- Financial stability.
- Housing and transportation.
- Family relationships.

Without knowing your entire situation, it will be impossible to accurately grasp your needs or provide the best types of treatment. Once the evaluation is complete, the professional refers you to the level of treatment that matches your needs, supports and stressors.

What Are Your Addiction Recovery Program Options?

There are many substance abuse treatment methods and levels. Levels usually refer to the intensity and goals of treatment with options including:

Detoxification

Frequently, detoxification is the first step towards substance abuse treatment. It is a set of strategies employed to reduce the risks associated with withdrawals. Professional detox helps allow the body to process and remove drugs from the system in a safe and supportive environment.

During detox, medical professional may prescribe and administer medications to make the process more comfortable. If detox is too distressing, you'll be compelled to restart or continue drug use.

Detoxification occurs over a few days in a hospital-like setting, or it can take place over several months with visits to a doctor's office. Detox, like other steps of drug addiction treatment, is a highly individualized practice tailored to your needs.

Inpatient/Residential Treatment

People who complete detoxification or people that do not need withdrawal management may begin their substance abuse treatment in an inpatient/residential setting. These treatments refer to any program that requires you to sleep at the treatment center during your stay.

Inpatient settings usually resemble a hospital atmosphere and last for a shorter amount of time. Residential treatments can look and feel more like a home with durations of treatment lasting for months or more.

By removing you from your stressful environment, inpatient/residential treatments permit you the time and freedom from responsibilities to focus only on recovery. The staff and other residents will guide you through the early stages of recovery by teaching you about the dangers of substance abuse and healthy coping skills to better manage your stressors.

Outpatient Treatment

Outpatient treatment refers to any program that permits you to attend your treatment and return home at night. These programs are a good fit for people with less intense symptoms or those who have already completed a period of inpatient/residential.

Outpatient programs offer a variety of treatment levels with options including:

- Partial hospitalization programs (PHPs) – daily treatment with sessions lasting about six hours.
- Intensive outpatient programs (IOPs) – treatment two to three days per week lasting two to three hours each session.
- Standard outpatient – weekly, biweekly, or monthly appointments lasting about an hour.

Outpatient treatments are less restrictive than inpatient/ residential programs, but they carry risks from triggers and stresses in the home environment. Someone engaged in outpatient treatment will need a very supportive social network to avoid the dangers of relapse.

Support Groups

Attending support groups is a great way to extend the benefit of professional drug addiction treatment methods. Unlike the other levels of care, support groups do not offer professional treatment. Instead, support groups are maintained and facilitated by other people in recovery.

Support groups can be used in combination with any other level of care. Examples of self-help/support groups include:

- AA – Alcoholics Anonymous.
- NA – Narcotics Anonymous.
- Other 12-step groups.
- SMART Recovery.

Helpful Behavioral Therapy Styles

In inpatient/residential or outpatient treatments, you are likely to encounter several styles of behavioral therapy. These substance abuse therapy techniques are used by the therapist to accomplish the goal of extending your period of abstinence.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a versatile style used for numerous physical health, mental health and substance abuse issues. In CBT, the therapist coaches you towards building an understanding of how your thoughts, feelings and behaviors are all interconnected.

CBT is based on the idea that modifying the way you talk to yourself can improve your life. By changing your thoughts and behaviors while encouraging healthier coping skills, your CBT therapist can help you manage your feelings and cravings to prevent relapse.

Motivational Interviewing

Many people in recovery have a certain level of uncertainty to the process. They struggle with the commitment and the desire needed to move forward towards sobriety.

Motivational interviewing (MI) recognizes this problem and aims to eliminate any doubt you may have. Rather than forcing recovery on you, a therapist using MI develops your motivation and drive to change.

MI will point out the differences between what you want and what you are doing to achieve what you want. This way you can learn to align your goals with your actions.

Contingency Management

Contingency management (CM) is based on a basic principle: behaviors that are rewarded will increase, and behaviors that are punished or ignored will decrease. Since substance abuse is a very rewarding experience for many, CM attempts to overpower the reward of drugs and alcohol.

CM offers you tangible reinforcement for completing recovery-based and prosocial tasks. Turning in a clean urine screen could earn money or extra tickets for a prize lottery. Attending therapy or support groups could let you receive new clothing or restaurant gift cards.

As time goes on, the rewards of addiction will fade, and the positives of recovery take over.

Addiction Recovery Modalities

Modalities refer to the types of treatment you are receiving, often separated into three groups:

- Individual therapy – one-on-one meetings with you and the therapist.
- Family therapy – meetings involving you, a therapist, and one or more people you know from your personal life.
- Group therapy – meetings involving you, at least one therapist, and one or more people dealing with addiction you do not know from your personal life.

Professionals in every level of care employ individual, family and group therapies. Also, many therapy styles like CBT, MI and CM can be used in an individual, family, or group setting.

For addiction recovery, all therapy modalities can be helpful.

The Role of Medications

Behavioral therapies play an important role in addiction recovery but so do medications. When prescribed by a professional, medications can aid with:

Easing Withdrawals

As mentioned, the discomfort of withdrawals leads many to relapse. In this situation, medications can reduce the cravings and launch early recovery from the drug of choice.

Preventing Relapse

Once detoxification concludes and withdrawal symptoms pass, medications can help prolong abstinence from opioids, alcohol and tobacco. Medications start to return normal functioning to the brain, which has been damaged by substance use.

Co-Occurring Disorders

People suffering from addiction have higher chances of having another mental health disorder like depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder. If this is the case, it will be essential all conditions are treated simultaneously as mental health issues can be an underlying condition fueling addiction.

Be sure to speak with your treatment team regarding your substance abuse treatment plan to ensure your program goals and objectives include all important phases of recovery. Only treating the addiction will never result in a lasting recovery.