The Power and Persuasion of Drug Addiction

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Understanding Drug Addiction and Use

It is amazing to hear after so much time and experience with drug addiction, and some people don't understand the full impact of substances and their devastating influence. Instead of truth and fact, it seems lies, and rumors continue to fill the air.

Drug addiction and substance use are incredibly common public health issues. Answers and resolutions for the issue do not come easy, but building a fundamental understanding of drug use, abuse, addiction, and dependence helps treat the problem.

What Is Drug Addiction?

Drug addiction is a complicated issue to cover because it looks different in every situation. Some people will face a sharp and rapid decline of health and functioning due to addiction, while others can maintain their lifestyle for an extended period.

In simple terms, drug addiction is a state of mind where substance use consumes a person. Their thoughts center around getting and using the drug, and their actions involve doing whatever is needed to secure the substance.

People with drug addictions are out of control and unable to control their thoughts or behaviors. Instead, the psychological power of the alcohol or drug makes the decisions.

A person indeed has the choice to prevent addiction by never using a substance in the first place, but no one asks to become addicted to a drug. The person addicted cannot just choose to stop taking drugs because the obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors are too strong to deny.

When addicted, a person chooses the drug and drug use over all the other pleasurable aspects of life. With time, friends, family, work, school, fun activities, and life goals all take a back seat to addiction.

Addiction, Tolerance, and Dependence

Addiction is a huge concern, but it is not alone. It frequently occurs with tolerance and dependence as well.

Many confuse addition and dependence as the same problem, but in reality, they are very separate issues. Perhaps the biggest difference is that:

- Addiction is a psychological issue
- Dependence and tolerance are physiological issues

All drug use changes the structure and function of the brain. Every time a drug reaches the brain, it triggers a

strong release of chemicals that rewards use and encourages it to repeat.

As a response aimed at maintaining balance, the brain tries to counteract the influence of the drug. For example, when someone uses cocaine, the drug triggers a massive release of brain chemicals that make someone feel alert, energetic, and extremely happy. Over time, the brain begins to limit the release of these chemicals and even begins to produce more chemicals to negate the effects of cocaine.

Now, the person wants cocaine, but they need more as the brain turns down the effect. This process is called tolerance.

With steady use, though, the drug creates a "new normal" in the brain. If the person stops using the drug, the brain will be out of balance with too little of some chemicals and too much of others. In this state, the person is dependent on the drug and can feel very uncomfortable if none is available.

Why Use Drugs in the First Place?

As mentioned, the only way to avoid addiction and dependence is to prevent substance use in the first place. For some, this plan is not so easy.

People use drugs for a variety of reasons like:

- **To feel good.** Whether in a party-like atmosphere or a normal day at home, people will abuse drugs to experience the euphoric high or other effects the substance is capable of producing.
- **To feel better.** Other people use drugs to feel "normal." Someone with depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions will hope substances make them feel and function like everyone else.
- **To perform better.** Performance-enhancing drugs are not only for professional athletes. People may use drugs to help them perform better in academic, social, or athletic situations.
- **To experiment.** This group of drug users are fueled by their curiosity about the substance and the effects it creates.

Over the years, another source of addiction has developed – prescription drugs. A person may receive a valid prescription for a drug, like an opioid painkiller or a benzodiazepine sedative, only to become addicted to it.

Often, the process begins with the person using the substance as directed, developing a tolerance, and then becoming dependent on the substance. At some point, the prescribed dose is not enough, or the prescriber decides to end treatment. Either situation may lead to the individual exploring other methods to get and use the drug because they feel compelled to keep taking it.

People at high risk for substance use include those with:

- Various physical health conditions
- Mental health issues
- Difficult childhoods with inconsistent parenting and dangerous environments
- Experience with abuse, neglect, and trauma
- Anger problems
- Poor housing and finances

Other people grow up in settings where substance use is a normal part of life. In these situations, they see others using drugs and alcohol as a normal way to cope with the struggles and stresses of life.

Next page: The side effects of drug addiction, ending substance abuse, and more.

The Effects of Drug Use and Addiction

Alcohol and other drugs have the ability to completely devastate a person's physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. Various substances create their own list of short-term and long-term effects.

Common effects of drug use include:

- **Mood changes.** Most substances boost someone's mood in the short-term to create intense happiness. After these effects wear off, the person may appear grumpy, irritable, or depressed.
- **Energy changes.** Stimulant substances like cocaine and medications for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) work to speed up the body, increase heart rate and blood pressure, and boost energy. Sedatives, opioids, and alcohol usually have the opposite effect and make people relaxed and sleepy.
- **Perceptual changes.** Some substances are capable of producing strong perceptual changes that lead to the person seeing things, hearing things, or feeling things that are not present.

A person using substances may:

- Shift their social interactions by spending time with new people or completely isolating themselves
- Change their sleeping schedule and receive much more or much less sleep
- Look different with changes in their weight, skin, teeth, eyes, or self-care
- Complain of frequent physical health problems to explain their state
- Lie, cheat, and steal to continue substance use and avoid being detected by others

Prolonged drug abuse always concludes with a multitude of physical and mental health complaints. With enough time, substance use can create irreversible damage to the:

- Liver
- Kidneys
- Lungs
- Throat
- Pancreas
- Brain

The Challenges of Ending Substance Use

People start using alcohol and other drugs for a variety of reasons, but there is one main culprit that keeps people compulsively using drugs – withdrawal symptoms. For some substances, withdrawal symptoms are very distressing and very dangerous.

The brain changes linked to tolerance and dependence create a new brain that requires the substance to feel well and function normally. When substance use ends, the imbalance of the new normal causes the brain to be overwhelmed and unable to counteract certain brain chemicals.

As the substance begins to leave the body, the withdrawal symptoms will emerge. Usually, the withdrawal symptoms are the opposite of the signs of intoxication, so if a drug creates a lot of energy and focus, the person will feel lethargic and scattered.

Since intoxication makes people feel happy, withdrawal symptoms always make the person feel depressed, anxious, or irritable. Many people continue substance use as a way to avoid feeling these ways and as a way to control the strong cravings that emerge along with withdrawal symptoms.

Withdrawal from alcohol, sedatives, and opioids is especially dangerous. These substances can trigger a complex and harmful impact on the body.

Alcohol and sedatives can create deadly seizures during withdrawal. Opioids spark multiple health risks, including heart issues, the risk for pneumonia, and dehydration.

The Need for Specialized Treatment

Drug addiction requires specialized treatment to ensure the needed level of safety and effectiveness a person deserves. Unfortunately, some people attempt to detox from alcohol and other drugs without the guidance of medical or addiction professionals. When this happens, the person increases the risk of poor outcomes like:

- Serious mental health complications
- Serious physical health complications
- Relapse
- Overdose
- Death

For people willing to seek it, professional addiction treatment is widely available. Most insurance plans cover all levels of addiction treatment, and in some situations, even people without insurance can receive treatment at low or no cost.

The best treatments match the needs of the individual. Some people will need very intense inpatient or residential care early in treatment while others can receive lower levels of care and still benefit.

Inpatient and Outpatient Treatment

Inpatient and residential treatments are ideal for people with powerful addictions, complicated mental health issues, limited supports, and a prior history of relapse. These treatments involve the person living at the facility throughout treatment. They will receive two-hour care from a team of professionals to limit withdrawal and establish a period of recovery.

Outpatient treatments allow the person to come to the facility for treatment at scheduled intervals before returning to home or work. This treatment setting is a good fit for people with more straightforward addictions, plenty of family supports, and fewer mental or medical complications.

Medications

No matter the setting or stage of treatment, medical intervention can be helpful in addiction treatment. Medications can address:

- Withdrawal symptoms
- Cravings for more drugs
- Underlying mental health issues that encourage use

Conclusion

For people going through substance use treatment, as well as their loved ones, it is essential to remember that the addiction recovery process is a long one. Many view the path to recovery as one that takes a lifetime. There is no end to addiction treatment.

Along the same lines, relapse is a part of recovery. Relapse does not mean that treatment is ineffective or that the person cannot be helped. It only means that a renewed devotion to treatment is needed to reestablish and maintain recovery.