

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) What is Addiction?



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Table of Contents

What is Addiction?

Do You or a Loved One Have a Drug Abuse Problem?

Signs of Drug Abuse and Addiction

How Does Drug Abuse Become Addiction?

Addiction Risk Factors

Does Addiction Run in Families?

Why Is It So Hard to Quit Drugs?

Do You or a Loved One Have a Drug Abuse Problem?

Here are some questions to ask yourself or someone you know. If the answer to some or all of these questions is yes, you might have an addiction.



You can call **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** at any time to find drug treatment centers in your area.

- Do you think a lot about drugs?
- Did you ever try to stop or cut down on your drug use but couldn't?
- Have you ever thought you couldn't fit in or have a good time without drugs?
- Do you ever use drugs because you are upset or angry at other people?
- Have you ever used a drug without knowing what it was or what it would do to you?
- Have you ever taken one drug to get over the effects of another?
- Have you ever made mistakes at a job or at school because you were using drugs?
- Does the thought of running out of drugs really scare you?

- Have you ever stolen drugs or stolen stuff to pay for drugs?
- Have you ever been arrested or in the hospital because of your drug use?
- Have you ever overdosed on drugs?
- Has using drugs hurt your relationships with other people?

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Signs of Drug Abuse and Addiction

People with drug problems might act differently than they used to. They might:

- Spend a lot of time alone
- Lose interest in their favorite things
- Get messy—for instance, not bathe, change clothes, or brush their teeth
- Be really tired and sad
- Be very energetic, talk fast, or say things that don't make sense
- Be nervous or cranky (in a bad mood)
- Quickly change between feeling bad and feeling good
- Sleep at strange hours
- Miss important appointments
- Have problems at work
- Eat a lot more or a lot less than usual

People with an addiction usually can't stop taking the drug on their own. They want and need more. They might try to stop taking the drug and then feel really sick. Then they take the drug again to stop feeling sick. They keep using the drug even though it's causing terrible family, health, or legal problems. They need help to stop using drugs.

[Drug Treatment](#) can help.

How Does Drug Abuse Become Addiction?



After you take a drug for a while, the feel-good parts of your brain get used to it. Soon, your brain and body must have the drug to just feel normal. Not everyone who uses drugs becomes addicted. Each person's body and brain are different. So people react to drugs differently. Your relationships, surroundings, and stress can also make you more or less likely to become addicted.

But how does taking drugs become an addiction?

Our brains want us to repeat things that we need or enjoy—like eating a good meal. That's why you want to eat more dessert than you know you should. That's why a little child often shouts "again!" when you do something to make her

laugh.

All drugs of abuse excite the parts of the brain that make you feel good. But, after you take a drug for a while, the feel-good parts of your brain get used to it. Then you need to take more of the drug to get the same good feeling. Soon, your brain and body must have the drug to just feel normal. You feel sick and awful without the drug. You no longer have the good feelings that you had when you first used the drug.

Addiction Risk Factors

What makes people more likely to get addicted to drugs?

- **Trouble at home.** If your home is an unhappy place, or was when you were growing up, you might be more likely to have a drug problem. When kids aren't cared for well, or there are lots of fights, or a parent is using drugs, the risk of addiction goes up.
- **Mental health problems.** People who have [mental health problems](#) such as depression, anxiety, or attention deficit disorder are more likely to become addicted. They might abuse drugs to try to feel better.
- **Trouble in school, trouble at work, trouble making friends.** Failures at school or work, or trouble getting along with people, can make life hard. You might abuse drugs to get your mind off these problems.
- **Hanging around other people who use drugs.** Friends or family members who use drugs might get you into trouble with drugs as well.
- **Starting drug use when you're young.** When kids use drugs, it affects how their bodies and brains finish growing. Using drugs when you are young increases your chances of becoming addicted when you are an adult.
- **Your biology.** Everyone's bodies react to drugs differently. Some people like the feeling the first time they try a drug and want more. Other people hate how it feels and never try it again.

Does Addiction Run in Families?

Addiction can run in families. If people in your family have addictions, you are more likely to become addicted if you use drugs. It's like having a greater chance of getting heart disease because your father and many of his relatives have it.

Often many people in a family will have drug problems. It can be a problem that continues through many generations. This can happen whether the family is rich, poor, or in between.

When parents have drug problems, life at home can be very unhappy for the children. This can make them even more likely to become addicted when they grow up.

The good news is that many children whose parents had drug problems do not become addicted when they grow up. The risk is higher but it does not have to happen. And you can protect yourself from the risk by not abusing drugs at all.

Why Is It So Hard to Quit Drugs?

Healing from addiction takes time. Making up your mind to stop using drugs is a big step. Being addicted makes you afraid of what will happen if you don't keep taking the drug. People often won't try quitting until they're forced to, because it seems too hard.

When you stop using the drug, it upsets your body and brain. You might feel very sick for a while, and feel a very strong need to take the drug. It can be really hard to refuse to use the drug when you feel that bad.

But you don't have to do it alone. [Support groups, treatment programs, and sometimes medicines can help](#). You'll meet people who understand what you're going through, who can give you advice and cheer you on. Counselors can help you find medicines that make you feel less sick and reduce your cravings to use the drug. They can also teach you how to cope with problems without using drugs.

After you've stopped using the drug, you still have a lot to do:

- You have to relearn how to live without using drugs.
- You have to work on the problems your drug abuse caused with your family, your job, your friends, and your money.
- You have to stay away from people you used drugs with, and places where you used.
- You have to learn what makes you want to take drugs again, so you can avoid or work on those things.
- You may also need treatment for problems that led to your drug use, such as depression, anxiety or other mental health problems.

A **trigger** is anything that makes a person feel the urge to go back to using drugs. It can be a place, person, thing, smell, feeling, or memory that reminds

the person of taking a drug and getting high. A trigger can be something stressful that you want to escape from. It can even be something that makes you feel happy. People fighting addiction need to stay away from the triggers that can make them start using drugs again. Just like people with breathing problems need to avoid smoke and dust.