

Addiction

What is Addiction?

Addiction is the repeated involvement with a satisfying, pleasurable, rewarding or enticing activity/substance despite negative consequences directly related to the activity/substance use. While addiction to alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, drugs and gambling are the most common mental health problems, there are many other areas in our lives as well that could be affected by video game, internet and social media addiction.

How Does Addiction Start?

Physiological and psychological factors interact with each other through the development phase of addiction. Intake of pleasure-inducing substances to escape emotions like spleen, unhappiness, uneasiness, anxiety activates the brain's pleasure centre. To get the same pleasurable effect, persons keep taking the drug. This pleasurable effect can be described as sudden pleasant and joyous feeling, but brain's level of dopamine goes back to normal as the drug wears off. Over time, persons may develop tolerance and resistance to a drug when the drug is used repeatedly and they need more frequent and increasing doses in order to keep getting the desired effect. Drug or alcohol withdrawal may precipitate action tremors involving body parts, along with other neuropsychiatric disturbances. Especially substances like morphine, heroin, and cocaine have serious physiological effects on our health as they directly affect brain processes and the nervous system, consequently causing several physical/neurological disorders. Due to the fact that heavy drugs change the way the brain works by affecting chemical neurotransmission, if a user quickly becomes familiar with such heavy drugs, their chances of becoming addicted rise. When a user does not take their daily dose of drug, s/he can have severe physical withdrawal symptoms depending on the type of the drug and so as to eliminate or reduce these symptoms, the user continues to take drugs to keep the vicious cycle of addiction going.

When we consider the psychological factors of the development of drug addiction, we are referring to users' desire to let go of paralyzing negative emotions and the fact that they think they feel themselves worthwhile and peaceful when using pleasure-inducing substances. With the body getting more used to drugs and taking larger doses or repeating the same habit even more frequently, users temporarily move away from daily life challenges and problems. When user does not drugs or exhibits the addictive behaviour s/he can feel intense uneasiness and tries to escape the real world problems by experiencing again and again this fake happiness, which in the ends can turn into a vicious cycle from which the user cannot get out and slowly losing his/her ability to find an appropriate solution to problems since s/he cannot have the power to deal with the real problem. That is the reason why drug addiction is a disruptive type of behaviour that makes it impossible for the person to focus on daily life and problems and to cope with them.

Signs and Symptoms of Addiction

- Having intense urges for taking the addictive substance, feeling that you have to use the substance every day
- Feeling tense, nervous or jittery when not taking the substance
- Having feelings of relaxation and satisfaction after using the substance
- Dedicating all of your time and energy to this particular harmful habit or substance. Feeding the addiction becomes the number one priority
- Having trouble managing responsibilities at work and/or school; neglecting social or family responsibilities
- Unsuccessful attempts to quit or reduce the cravings for the addictive substance/behaviour
- Social problems including failure to complete major tasks at home, work or school; disruption of communication and social life
- Failed attempts to quit the addictive substance/behaviour despite the fact that you are having trouble managing responsibilities at work/school; continuing to use the substance despite repeated negative social, financial, physical and mental consequences directly related to the substance use
- Feelings of intense anxiety and agitation between doses
- Taking larger or higher doses of the drug/substance over time and over a longer period of time to achieve the same effect (develop tolerance to the drug after repeated use over time)

What to Do if You Suspect That You're Addicted to Something?

If you realize that some or all of the things mentioned above are happening in your life, you can always contact a senior psychologist or a psychiatrist. You can always make an appointment at AU Counselling and Psychological Services to talk to a psychologist. A psychologist and psychiatrist usually collaborate during the treatment process. Psychiatrist may prescribe medication depending on patient's health and mental status. Psychologist, on the other hand, will contribute to the treatment process by helping the patient realize their real emotions, inner conflicts and promoting positive changes through psychotherapy.

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