

# Addiction Facts

## **Sometimes inaccurate information can block people from getting into recovery from Addiction.**

Scroll down to read frequently asked questions about Addiction.

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### **1. What is “Addiction”? How is it defined? Who is “Addicted” to a substance or behavior?**

Professionals have varying criteria to determine if someone has an addiction or not. While these methods differ, everybody agrees that addiction involves two central themes:

A) There is a **loss of Control** over how much somebody drinks or uses, and a compulsion to keep seeking out more.

B) The drinker or user suffers adverse **consequences** as a result of his drinking or using

Somebody who drinks, uses Marijuana, looks at pornography, or gambles away thousands of dollars is not necessarily addicted to anything.

Many people drink or do other things for recreation, in such a way that they are in total control and do not have persistent negative consequences from their behavior. While this may be a religious, spiritual, or social problem, it doesn't necessarily indicate Addiction, a term which relates to a psychiatric/brain condition.

Professionals use many different indicators when diagnosing an Addiction Disorder. Beware of non-professional misinformation available on the internet and in print. These resources may not accurately describe who is addicted and who isn't, only adding to your confusion and exacerbating your distress while seeking clarification.

If you want to know whether you or a loved one has an Addiction, we recommend meeting with a competent mental health professional who specializes in the assessment and treatment of Addictive Disorders.

**To read more about defining addiction on the National Institute of Drug Abuse website, click here-**

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/media-guide/science-drug-abuse-addiction-basics>

**To see a scientific scholarly definition of addiction by the American Society of Addiction Medicine, click here-**

<http://www.asam.org/quality-practice/definition-of-addiction>

## **2. Are there many levels of Addiction? Can it be that some people are just mildly struggling while others are severely addicted?**

Yes. Addiction comes in many levels and forms.

Therefore, one person can have a very strong addiction while another person can have a less-intense addiction.

According to the DSM 5 (a professional manual used to diagnose addiction to Substances & Gambling) Addictive disorders come in three levels: Mild, Moderate, & Severe. This reflects the experience of thousands of professionals in the field.

Some people make a mistake by assuming that all people with addiction are in the same box with the same nature of problem as well as the same level of severity.

Treatment also varies from person to person. Some people with a more severe addiction may need intense coordinated treatment with many components, such as medication, individual therapy, an intensive rehabilitation program, a 12 step group, or a combination of all of these things to find recovery for themselves. Others may need fewer interventions to benefit from treatment. A treatment program is very individual; it is built around the specific needs and strengths of the person turning for help. Some people only need brief therapy or advice and that alone may be sufficient to get back on track and untangled from addiction.

Again, a competent mental health professional who specializes in the assessment and treatment of Addictive disorders is recommended to know if you or a loved one have a mild, moderate, severe level Addiction, if at all. A trained professional can tailor a personal plan of action to help you find recovery, rather than offering a one-size-fits-all method that reflects their own limited training.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). DSM 5. American Psychiatric Association

<https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/dsmfactsheet/dsmfact.htm>

## **3. Can a person only become addicted to substances that he takes into his body? Can an addiction develop to external behaviors like gambling, gaming, or pornography?**

A person can become addicted to a behavior just like they can to drugs or alcohol.

For years professionals only considered drugs and alcohol to possibly form into addiction. Problems like compulsive gambling, compulsive sex, or compulsive eating was seen as different problems whose roots and treatment was not necessarily at all related to addiction.

In 2011, the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) stated publicly that they had scientifically determined that compulsive sex, gambling, or food intake can be understood as an addiction. Thus, we can talk about sex addiction, gambling addiction, food addiction, or other addictions besides substance abuse.

<http://www.asam.org/quality-practice/definition-of-addiction>

## **4. Is Addiction a real ‘disease’ or ‘disorder’? Is Addiction just an**

## **excuse for people to do whatever they please?**

Addiction is associated with impairment in the area of the brain that is used to make decisions, judgment, and exercise self-control. This can explain why people who suffer from an addiction use drugs or their addictive behavior past the set point for self-destruction; past the point where they do much damage to themselves and to their loved ones.

While it is true that Addiction can greatly lessen the addicted person's free-will with regard to his use of drugs or submission to the urges of the behavioral addiction, this is not an all or nothing phenomenon; it does not absolve the addicted person from responsibility for recovery nor make it impossible to build self-control toward recovery.

The recovery process is often hard to undertake alone. Many people benefit from help from a trusted friend or therapist, or exploring a 12 step group. An important step is always the self-recognition that "I indeed have a problem and it is unwanted and causing me pain and trouble. I need help with this."

The fact that a person is addicted to something does not give them permission to harm others, commit crime, absolve responsibility, and so on. This is why we can ask an addicted person to take responsibility for himself to take steps towards recovery.

<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/key-findings/neurobiology>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/drug-abuse-addiction>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2015/06/addiction-disease-free-will>

## **5. What is considered “recovery”? Who is considered to be in recovery or recovered from Addiction?**

Obviously, stopping to drink or do the addiction-behavior (also known as "abstinence") is a necessary factor in recovery from addiction. At the same time, we now know that building a healthy life style, with productivity, social connection and leisure activity and interest is critical to a full and long standing recovery.

It is possible for the addicted person to force themselves away from drinking or using with great effort, without making any changes in how they live or think. People in 12 step groups coin this type of person a “dry-drunk”. Instead of changing one’s character traits, fixing rocky relationships, getting out of debt, dropping various bad habits, and other possible things that reinforced him to drink in the first place, the “dry-drunk” spends him time running away from drinking-but fails to fix life itself.

Addictions take hold when the person's lives his life in a psychological and social desert. He must move into a healthy space in order to maintain sobriety. This is why many people with long term addictions require a broad based treatment program. They must rehabilitate physical, psychological, relational-social, and spiritual health. If the addicted person until now was not purposely engaged in life, or in his role as a spouse-parent-employee-or member of society, then recovery would include rejoining society and life in a purposeful and balanced way.

<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/key-findings/recovery>

<http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/Recovery%20Definition%20White%202007.pdf>

## **6. Is Addiction an acute or chronic problem? When recovery is complete is treatment no longer required? Is Addiction more like a common cold which comes and goes or a recurrent virus that requires careful watching to prevent reoccurrence?**

Addiction seems to be a chronic disorder in the brain. After an addicted person achieves sobriety from using drugs or doing their addiction-behavior, they need to maintain or keep their sobriety in order to avoid triggering a relapse.

In other words, the first step in addiction recovery is to stop drinking. The second step is doing what it takes to make sure they “stay stopped”.

As in many other chronic medical conditions, a person in Addiction recovery needs to continuously monitor themselves to prevent relapse. This doesn't necessarily mean that a person needs to be in therapy or a support group for the rest of their life. Those are just some very common ways of maintaining one's sobriety, but other methods may also be suitable for some people. The point is that every person in recovery must be his own watchdog; maintaining a practice of self-monitoring, checking in with trusted others and continually striving maintain a healthy lifestyle. All the above are necessary to prevent or minimize relapse.

Once we thought that it was only necessary to become sober and then health would be restored for good. We now know, from decades of research, that this is simply not so. Stopping usage is just the first step. The major step is aftercare, maintenance, and building a type of lifestyle with the necessary resources & tools to be able to remain sober as best and as long as possible.

<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/key-findings/neurobiology>

<http://www.asam.org/quality-practice/definition-of-addiction>

## **7. Is there only one way to get better from Addiction?**

There are many ways to heal from Addiction. There is not one single method of recovery which is demonstrably better than all the rest. There are many types of people, many forms of addiction, and a spectrum of various levels of addiction-intensity. Like anything else in life, some tools work better for some types of people than they do for others. Recovery may take on different forms at different times.

Some even say that introducing novelty in your recovery program can help to keep you interested and safe. So experience using the same recovery method for many years while others found for themselves being initially more involved in a support group, another time with yoga or meditation, and yet another time doing service or taking on an intense learning program. There is no one answer for anyone all the time.

Researchers have identified several different types of tools which have been found in the past to help real people recover from Addiction. Some of these tools include 12 Step and other mutual-aid recovery groups, professional inpatient-outpatient-and residential treatment programs, behavioral therapies, and certain medications.

<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/key-findings/early-intervention>

<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/key-findings/recovery>

<http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/CSAT%20ROSC%20Guiding%20Principles%202009.pdf>

## **8. How do I know if I/a loved one has an Addiction, or just a bad habit? How do I know if I need rehab/a 12 Step group/therapy/ etc.?**

It is recommended that you encourage and assist the person in question to meet with a compassionate and professional Addiction specialist. They are people who have invested in developing the knowledge, experience, and tools to guide you or your loved one towards good health. A genuine professional knows how to screen and assess addictive disorders and make appropriate recommendations for recovery.

## **9. What is “Alcoholics Anonymous” (A.A.) or similar 12 step groups?**

The official statement on the official A.A. website reads “Alcoholics Anonymous is an international fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem. It is nonprofessional, self-supporting, multiracial, apolitical, and available almost everywhere. There are no age or education requirements. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem.”

A.A. and other 12 Step groups have 12 guiding spiritual principles for recovery and life that, when followed, help to relieve people from the grasp of addiction.

To see the 12 Steps themselves, click here:

[http://www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/smf-121\\_en.pdf](http://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/smf-121_en.pdf)

There are many ways to understand how and why 12-step programs are helpful, but the facts on the ground are that these groups are free, friendly, and have benefited many people. There is a strong tradition and much research to show that they can be very helpful at all stages of the process from awareness through sobriety and onto lifelong health and recovery.

There are specialty 12 Step groups for virtually every imaginable type of Addictive disorder. These groups exist in person, online, in print, and in every common language. It isn't always essential to have just the group for your particular problem, sometimes factors such as convenience or the make-up of a particular group will make one group better for you than another. Know that it is the nature of 12-step groups to be welcoming toward new participants.

## **10. What is Alcoholic Anonymous’ official opinion regarding psychotherapy, rehabilitation programs or other methods of Addiction recovery? Do the 12 Steps object to psychotherapy or any other recovery tools?**

According to A.A.’s “Tenth Tradition” Alcoholics Anonymous officially does not take a view on any issues other than the 12 Step program itself. Below are several quotes from A.A.’s co-founder Bill Wilson about how A.A. relates to other recovery tools aside from the 12 Step program.

“Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on out- side issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions, p. 176)

“AA has no monopoly on reviving alcoholics.”

Wilson, 1944/1988, p.98)

“The average member of Alcoholics Anonymous does not suppose we have a cure- all.” (Wilson, 1945b, p. 239)

“Upon therapy for the alcoholic himself, we surely have no monopoly.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, 1955, p. ix)

“In no circumstances should members feel that Alcoholics Anonymous is the know- all and do-all of alcoholism.”

Wilson, 1965/1988, p. 332)

“Then, too, it would be a product of false pride to believe that Alcoholics Anonymous is a cure-all, even for alcoholism.”

Wilson, 1963/1988, p. 346)

“When you consider the ramifications of this disease, we have just scratched the surface. I think we should humbly remember this.” (Wilson, 1969, p. 9)

## **11. Is it possible to recover?**

Yes! It is certainly possible to recover from Addiction!

Hundreds of thousands of people have recovered from various Addictions. Participants in 12-Step programs regularly share their “experience, strength, and hope” or in other words their personal story of how they recovered, just so that people struggling with addiction can see that recovery is attainable.

Research shows that even people with very severe addictive-disorders can recover completely while many others may recover via using less frequently with less intense consequences; the struggle to recover does yield results, making life better than before.

[http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/\\_\\_books/full\\_texts/2012%20Recovery-Remission%20from%20Substance%20Use%20DisordersFinal.pdf](http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/__books/full_texts/2012%20Recovery-Remission%20from%20Substance%20Use%20DisordersFinal.pdf)

<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/key-findings/early-intervention>

## **12. What type of people become Addicted? And who is protected and safe from Addiction?**

There is no single type of person that becomes addicted! Any type of person can become addicted despite their age, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, and so on.

When people think of somebody addicted, they often have in their mind a scruffy looking young person with ripped jeans, fully tattooed, injecting heroine with a syringe into their vein. The truth is that an elderly woman wearing a bonnet on a rocking can also be addicted to the same drug, taken in the form of pain killer pills she

got from her physician! Addiction can happen to any type of person.

Addicted people look like regular people!

Scientists have determined that no one is guaranteed safe from addiction. However, certain risk and protective factors have been identified that can make a person more or less likely to become addicted to a substance or behavior.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/practicing-effective-prevention/prevention-behavioral-health/risk-protective-factors>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/preventing-drug-abuse-among-children-adolescents/chapter-1-risk-factors-protective-factors/what-are-risk-factors>

### **13. What type of problem is Addiction? A biological problem? Psychological? A spiritual or religious issue?**

Many different theories exist to explain the root of addiction. The most common understanding adopted by professionals is the bio-psycho-social model, which states that Addiction is caused by the compounded effect of biological, psychological, and social factors. Others add that spiritual weakness can promote Addiction.

For some the biological causes will be stronger; for example, a head-injury may undermine the capacity for self-control and increase impulsivity. For another, psychological factors such as pervasive negative beliefs about the self, others or the world may dominate the causal factors. In yet another, social factors, such as isolation or loss of social status, may be trigger the onset of addiction.

Beware of those who oversimplify Addiction!

If there were simple solution the problem of Addiction would not be so pervasive and tenacious, universal and stubborn. Indeed there are stories of inspired almost miraculous recovery but the common pattern is one of consistent hard work toward recovery. “Quick-fixes” are short lived and generally only add to the addict person's sense of failure and hopelessness, ultimately making the problem worse.

Oversimplified approaches to recovery fail though it is tempting, especially for an addicted person in his weakness to grasp at the promise of a “secret” approach or newly discovered “unique pitch”.

Claims that any single method has helped “everyone” or professes statistically high rates of success are likely false. Addiction is too complex and recovery too complicated for such grand schemes to be credible. Become a healthy skeptic; investigate the real science, not the hard sell, regarding whatever route of recovery is before you. Invest your time, money, and effort wisely to bring results. Slow and steady does win this race and brings the prize of continually growing health and well-being. Recovery is a slow process for sure, but it is also a sure process with immediate and long term rewards. When you take a well-worn path it is likely to be effective for you as well.

<http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.taap.org/resource/resmgr/imported/HO%201h%20ItIsntJustBrainDisease%20Bipsychoso>

### **14. How do I know if a therapist is competent in helping people with addiction?**

Disclaimer: We do not bear responsibility for determining who is a competent therapist! Here is a site that offers some guidance in selecting a therapist:

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/therapists-spill-red-flags-a-clinician-isnt-right-for-you/>

Below are some questions you may want answered. Don't be shy-you and your resources are very precious, especially so if you are suffering with an addiction. It is time to take care of yourself by finding a competent, capable and caring partner or guide in your recovery :

Did this person ever receive professional training? If so, where?

How long was their training for-30 hours? Several years?

Does this person have an academic degree in the field of psychotherapy and mental health treatment?

Does the person have special training or certification in Addiction counseling?

Does this person specialize or have familiarity with the problem you struggle with?

Who recommends this person? Do trustworthy people or professionals rely on this person's expertise?

Is the person dogmatic? Do they insist there is only one way to treat addiction, for all people?

Can you see yourself being able to trust this person and work with them towards recovery?

Have other professionals that you know heard of this person? Can they help you find out more about their qualifications?

Does this person come off as being a close minded "know-it-all"?

Is there a professional referral agency in your community or city that can recommend to you someone who they know is qualified to help you?

## **15. What if I have no money for therapy, rehab, or other Addiction-recovery resources?**

Many people seeking recovery simply do not have the money or insurance coverage for rehab programs, individual therapy, or other recovery tools.

Does this mean that they cannot recover? Absolutely not!

First of all, remember that 12-Step groups are completely free of charge and have been found to help a lot of people find recovery from addiction. You can find a 12-Step group that deals with your particular addiction by looking on the internet or by asking a therapist. Every imaginable type of 12-step group is listed on the internet with contact numbers to get in touch with.

Furthermore, because addiction is such a huge social problem there may be social welfare programs available to you through your community welfare office. Anyone professionally involved in public mental health should know how to help you access these resources.

Moreover, there is a multitude of free online resources: online support groups, articles, helpful videos, and so on. Not everything you will find online will be helpful, and the wrong advice may confuse or harm, but often, with a little caution and good judgment you will find resources helpful to your recovery.

And lastly, reach out to others. Striving for recovery is something to be proud of, ask for and accept help. Seek out a caring community leader, trusted teacher, family member, or close friend that can work with you confidentially. With someone else scouting with you, you may uncover hidden resources like a local organization that helps people find affordable therapy or a charity organization that finances professional help.

Recovery is on a continuum and so it is possible for anyone and everyone that tries! If at first you don't succeed, try and try again. Consider that you are practicing, rather than failing. Recovery is bumpy for everyone-as long as you get back on track you are on your way, and life will be better.