



More than 1 in 7 Americans age 12 years and older have a substance problem.

Major advances in neuroscience, brain imaging, and behavioral research show that addiction can be thought of as a complex brain disease affecting behavior. However, it is often viewed as a moral failing due to lack of willpower, and therefore, not treated as a medical illness. Those living with addiction, and their families, often feel isolated in their struggle to understand the disease and find effective treatment. This is due in part to the shame and stigma attached to addiction and to the separation of most treatment from mainstream health care practice.



Treatment Options

If you believe you may be struggling with addiction, please call Behavioral HealthCare Options, Inc. at **702-364-1484** or toll-free **1-800-873-2246, TTY 711**

Sources:
drugabuse.gov, hhs.gov

Tiene derecho a recibir ayuda e información en su idioma sin costo. Para solicitar un intérprete, llame al número de teléfono gratuito para miembros que se encuentra en su tarjeta de identificación del plan o los documentos de su plan.



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The Dangers of Substance Use

The Face of Addiction

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What is drug addiction?

Addiction (substance use disorder) is a chronic disease characterized by drug seeking and use that is compulsive, or difficult to control, despite harmful consequences. The initial decision to take drugs is voluntary for most people, but repeated drug use can lead to brain changes that challenge an addicted person's self-control and interfere with their ability to resist intense urges to take drugs.

These brain changes can be persistent, which is why drug addiction is considered a "relapsing" disease. People in recovery from drug use disorders are at increased risk for returning to drug use even after years of not taking the drug.

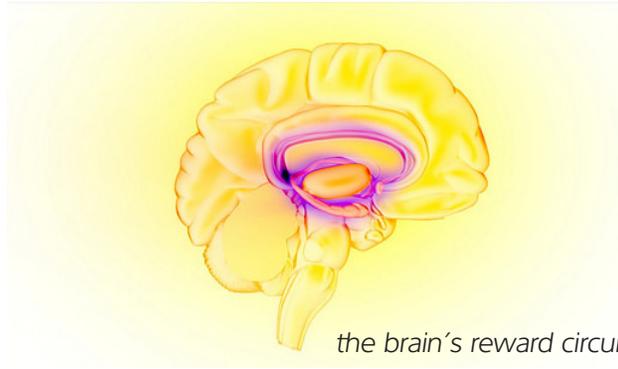
It's common for a person to relapse, but relapse doesn't mean that treatment doesn't work. As with other chronic health conditions, treatment should be ongoing and should be adjusted based on how the patient responds. Treatment plans need to be reviewed often and modified to fit the patient's changing needs.



What happens to the brain when a person takes drugs?

Most drugs affect the brain's "reward circuit" by flooding it with the chemical messenger dopamine. This reward system controls the body's ability to feel pleasure and motivates a person to repeat behaviors needed to thrive, such as eating and spending time with loved ones.

This overstimulation of the reward circuit causes the intensely pleasurable "high" that can lead people to take a drug again and again.



As a person continues to use drugs, the brain adjusts to the excess dopamine by making less of it and/or reducing the ability of cells in the reward circuit to respond to it. This reduces the high that the person feels compared to the high they felt when first taking the drug—an effect known as tolerance. They might take more of the drug, trying to achieve the same dopamine high. It can also cause them to get less pleasure from other things they once enjoyed, like food or social activities.



What are the symptoms of substance use disorder?

One of the most important signs of substance use disorder, or dependence, is the continued use of drugs or alcohol despite experiencing the serious negative consequences of heavy drug or alcohol use.

Other symptoms of substance use disorder include:

- **Tolerance:** A person will need increasingly larger amounts of alcohol or drugs to get high.
- **Craving:** A person will feel a strong need, desire, or urge to use alcohol or drugs. Craving is a primary symptom of addiction.
- **Loss of control:** A person often will drink more alcohol or take more drugs than they mean to, or may use alcohol or drugs at a time or place they hadn't planned.
- **Physical dependence or withdrawal symptoms:** In some cases when alcohol or drug use is stopped, a person may experience withdrawal symptoms which can include nausea, sweating, shakiness, and extreme anxiety.

Long-term use also causes changes in other brain chemical systems and circuits as well, affecting functions that include:

- learning
- judgment
- decision-making
- stress management
- memory
- behavioral control