

Facts About Addiction

What is addiction?

It's when you lose control over a substance or activity. People who are addicted usually can't stop their problem behavior even though it may ruin their health, destroy their relationships with family and friends, wipe out their savings, and cause the loss of a job and other problems.

What are common addictions?

There are many different kinds of addiction. Some people are addicted to substances such as alcohol, illegal drugs such as cocaine or heroin, prescription drugs such as Valium or sleeping pills, nicotine in cigarettes or other tobacco products, and caffeine in coffee, tea or colas. People can also be addicted to activities such as eating, gambling, sex, work, exercise, shopping, etc.

Who can develop addictions?

Anyone can —young or old, male or female. No one knows for sure why some people become addicted and others don't. Family history, personality, living situation, and social factors (friends, family) all seem to play a role. Addictions may develop very fast or happen over many years.

How do I know if I have an addiction?

Addiction usually follows a pattern. First, you try a substance or activity to find out what it's like. Then you keep using the substance or doing the activity to get a "rush" or "high" or to avoid facing a problem you may be having. You continue the addictive behavior and deny any of the bad effects it may be having on your health, job performance or relationships. Finally, you lose control completely—even after realizing the bad effects. You can't stop doing it, despite attempts to cut down or stop.

What can I do about an addiction?

There is a lot you can do. Just follow these steps:

1. Admit you have a problem. This is the first step to recovery and a life free of addiction.
2. Talk with someone you trust. Don't try to go it alone. Seek the help of a close family member, friend, doctor, therapist, or religious leader.
3. Get expert help. Find out what types of treatment are available for your addiction such as residential treatment, professional counseling, drug therapy, nutrition counseling, or self-help groups.

Remember that addictions are treatable and recovery can renew your health and happiness and bring you peace of mind.