

What Is Addiction?

Addiction is when a person can't stop drinking alcohol or taking a drug, even if they want to. The urge to drink or use the drug is too strong to control, even if they know the drug is hurting them and their family.

When people start drinking or using drugs, they don't plan to get addicted. They like how it makes them feel. They believe they can control how much and how often they drink or take the drug. However, drugs change the brain. Drug users start to need the drug just to feel normal, and addiction can quickly take over a person's life.

Addiction is a brain disease.

- Drugs change how the brain works.
- These brain changes can last for a long time.
- These brain changes can cause problems like mood swings, memory loss, and trouble thinking and making decisions.

Addiction is a disease, just as diabetes and cancer are diseases. Addiction is not simply a weakness. People from all backgrounds, rich or poor, can get an addiction. Addiction can happen at any age, but it usually starts when a person is young.

When someone is addicted to drugs or alcohol, drinking alcohol or taking the drug can become the most important thing in their life, more important than eating or sleeping. The urge to get and use the drug can fill every moment of a person's life. The addiction replaces all the things the person used to enjoy. A person who is addicted might do almost anything—lying, stealing, or hurting people—to keep drinking or taking the drug. These things could get the person arrested. On the one hand, addiction feels so good that they want to use more. On the other hand, addiction leads to negative consequences.

People only stop using drugs and alcohol when they have suffered enough negative consequences. When you've suffered enough pain and regret, you are ready to stop.

If you need help or know of someone who might need help with their addiction, you can call the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) toll-free telephone number for alcohol and drug information/treatment referral assistance at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). You can also locate behavioral health treatment services near you by going to: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>.

SOURCE: National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)