

# The Chronic Disease of Addiction



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## Definition of Addiction

- ▶ Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry.
- ▶ Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.



## Definition of Addiction (con't.)

- ▶ Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response.
- ▶ Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission.

## Definition of Addiction (con't.)

- ▶ Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.

-American Society of Addiction Medicine  
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## How can use progress to addiction?

- ▶ Different drugs do different things to the brain, but all increase *dopamine* in the brain circuits that control reward and pleasure.
- ▶ The brain is wired to encourage “survival” and other healthy activities by releasing dopamine.
  - If it feels good, the brain decides it must be important.
  - Because it feels so good, “I want this!”

## How can use progress to addiction?

- ▶ Activities like spending time with friends, listening to music, sports, reading a good book, shopping, etc. release dopamine in moderate amounts. This reinforces these activities or behaviors.
- ▶ Drug use can flood the reward circuits with more dopamine than normal. This creates a strong drive to repeat the experience.

## How can use progress to addiction?

- ▶ If the drug-using experience is repeated, the brain reinforces the links between pleasure and drug use. This gets stronger and stronger.
- ▶ Using may assume an importance in the person's life that is out of proportion to other rewards.
- ▶ Chronic drug use not only realigns a person's priorities, but also can alter brain areas necessary for judgment and self-control.

## How can use progress to addiction?

- ▶ This further reduces the person's ability to control or stop the drug use.
- ▶ This is why (despite popular belief) willpower alone is often insufficient to overcome an addiction because drug use has interfered with the parts of the brain that make it possible to say "no".
- ▶ "Choice Argument"

## So what are treating?

- ▶ Underlying distortions in decision-making and perceptions of reality are what drive the addiction.
- ▶ Alcohol/drug use is only the “tip of the iceberg”.
- ▶ Must treat all aspects of the person (psychological, medical, emotional, spiritual) because all are interconnected and impacted by abusive chemical use.

## Risk Factors for Developing Addiction

1. Beginning substance abuse at an early age
2. Inherited genetic predisposition (does the buzz feel good?)
3. Exposure to stress (primes the brain to be sensitive to stress & seek relief from it)
4. Early negative life experiences

## Dependence vs. Addiction

- ▶ Physical dependence can occur without addiction.
- ▶ Common experience of most chronic pain patients who are able to take their opioid medication as prescribed for pain but don't develop the uncontrollable compulsion and loss of control.
- ▶ **A desire to avoid withdrawal is not addiction**

## Additional Resources

- ▶ Townhall II (24/7 Helpline 330.678.HELP)
  - townhall2.com
- ▶ American Society of Addiction Medicine
  - asam.org
- ▶ Ohio Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services
  - mha.ohio.gov
- ▶ Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County
  - mental-health-recovery.org