

Addiction Signs, Symptoms, and Statistics

What is Addiction?

Addiction is a chronic and relapsing brain disorder known for producing a compulsive, irresistible urge to abuse substances, even though the consequences of substance use are negative, even catastrophic. The causes of addiction aren't precisely known, although it's thought that addiction is caused by interactions between both a person's genetics and their environment. Addiction can run in families and having a close relative--a parent or sibling--that is a substance addict increases a person's likelihood of developing an addiction, even if they aren't raised in the same home.

People abuse many different substances, including painkillers, anti-anxiety medications, illicit opioids like heroin, and other items, like inhalants. Alcohol and tobacco are the most commonly used addictive substances. Addicts can also have independent psychological disorders like depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorders at the same time they're suffering from active addiction. It's also possible for a person to be addicted to more than one substance at a time. Polysubstance addiction can involve all classes of legal and illicit drugs, including alcohol, painkillers, anti-anxiety medications, relaxants, sleeping medications, and/or inhalants.

People from every walk of life, every socioeconomic status, and every race, creed, and religion can be addicts. It is a non-discriminatory disorder. A person can be an addict without ever using a needle or "street drugs," and alcoholism is an addictive disorder itself. Whenever you're reading about drug addiction, you can substitute alcohol for "drug addiction," as Alcohol Abuse Disorder [affects tens of millions of Americans](#).

If you're concerned that you might have a drug addiction, ask yourself:

- Do you use legal drugs to excess or use them in a way they are not meant to be used?
- Are you using legal prescription medications that have not been prescribed for you?
- Do you find yourself often running out of legal prescription painkillers before the prescription runs out?
- Have you broken the law to get your drug or substance of choice?
- Do you hide your drug or substance use from others?
- Have you neglected or lost personal relationships because of your drug use?
- Have you lost a job or had problems in schooling due to use?
- Have you tried to quit and been unable to do so for any significant duration?

- Have you ever had legal problems because of alcohol or substance abuse?

If you answer yes to one of these, you may have a problem with substance abuse. If you've answered two or more, you may suffer from addiction.

Signs and Symptoms of Addiction

Of all the signs and symptoms of addiction, perhaps the three most telling are compulsive use, cravings, and withdrawal. It is an unholy trinity of effects that propels a person to keep abusing substances, even when continued use of substances yields terrible consequences.

- **Compulsive use of substances.** An addict has little to no control over their substance abuse until they get treatment. Even then, relapse is common.
- **Cravings.** Addiction produces intense urges to use the drug of choice. These cravings can be profoundly hard to resist. Cravings are the number one cause of relapse.
- **Withdrawal.** A person who suffers from addiction may experience unpleasant or even intensely painful physical and psychological effects when attempting to quit using. These symptoms include shakes, nausea, stomach cramps, vomiting, headaches, visual disturbances, high levels of irritability and temper outbursts, as well as elevated anxiety and paranoia.
- **Using alone.** Addictions sometimes having "using buddies" they feel comfortable with, but many times they will use alone.
- **Determining friends and relationships around usage.** Addicts will abandon friends and family who don't use drugs. and either cultivate friendships with other addicts who will not criticize their addiction or will instead self-isolate. This leads to addicts losing all healthy relationships.
- **Abusing substances to cope with or avoid problems and abusing substances to cope with feelings.** Addicts use drugs to manage painful emotions, anxieties, and fears.
- **Abusing substances to celebrate good times and suppress the bad times.** People with addiction problems use drugs to make the good times seem better and cushion bad times. Many people with addiction problems are also self-sabotaging and have long poor self-esteem. They may sabotage great opportunities due to fearing they will fail later on, no matter what.
- **Thinking about the drug of choice.** Obsessional thinking about the drug is common. Addicts will think about the drug's effects, plan to get the drug, figure out how and when to use it, and how to hide their drug abuse.
- **Trying and Failing to Quit.** People suffering from addiction problems often try to quit and fail. People also attempt to reduce or moderate their drug use and find themselves unable to do so.

- Continuing usage despite health or financial problems. An addict will continue to abuse substances even though using those substances is killing them and draining all their resources.
- Planning life around usage. Addicts will restructure their lives to make sure they have time to use and can use without others knowing. This all fails.
- Having friends or relatives complain or express concern about drug usage. Loved ones, friends, and co-workers will begin to notice the effects addiction has on your life and will try to talk about it.

Causes of Addiction

The causes of addiction are not clear yet, [although addiction is known to be a neurological disorder](#). It's also known that the question of genetics versus the environment isn't an either/or proposition. Rather, both factors influence the development of addiction.

Addiction Statistics

The last 70 years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of statistics being kept and reviewed concerning addiction. Demographic data for different genders, races, and other determiners have shown that while addiction to any particular class of substance may rise and fall, addiction itself is not going away or overall decreasing.

Addictions in Different Populations

Addiction rates can vary according to age, race, and gender. Other factors, such as sexual orientation, also play a role in the demographics of addiction.

Addiction in Teens and Children

Addiction in teens and children has reached its lowest point in several decades but is still not uncommon. However, there are still big problems, especially with underage drinking. By age 18, about 60 percent of teens have had at least 1 drink, and about [eight million people aged 12 to 20](#) self-report drinking more than "a few sips" of alcohol.

Teens show the same biological issues with addictions that adults do, but they often abuse drugs differently. Many teens become addicted to painkillers that are legally prescribed for them due to dental work or injuries through sports. Sustaining an addiction to prescribed analgesics often means that adolescent addicts will steal pain medicine from unused supplies at a grandparent's or other relative's home.

Addiction in Adults

Addiction in adults may be broken down into early adulthood, midlife addiction, and then addiction in the elderly. Typically, people think of addiction occurring in the years from 21 to 65, although increasingly, addiction is becoming a problem for senior citizens.

Addiction in the Elderly

The elderly typically face addiction to opioid-class painkillers and alcohol. As with other segments of the adult population, [alcohol is the most commonly abused substance of the elderly](#). Prescription drug abuse and the abuse of illicit drugs occur at a [higher rate in the United States](#) than in any other country in the developed world. This is due to the unusually high availability of legal opioids in the USA.

Addiction and Gender: Men vs Women

Differences between men and women seem to be due to the way gender is socialized. Typically, men are about twice as likely to have addiction problems, but women are more likely to die by overdose. This difference is thought to be due to the [stigma attached to addiction](#).

LGBT Addiction Statistics

LGBT people are [more likely to suffer from addiction than heteronormative individuals](#). The increase seems to be attributable to the following conditions:

- Lack of Treatment Services for LGBT People. Less than ten percent of all addiction treatment programs are specialized for LGBT people.
- Stress. Stress is high for many LGBT people. A society that's often hostile provokes a great deal of fear, isolation, anger, and depression. Many people become addicted because they use substances to help them cope.
- Fear of Discrimination in Addiction Treatment. Outright discrimination and homophobia are common enough in society; add to that the stigma of addiction and LGBT people may be more hesitant to seek out treatment, fearing that treatment programs will be as hostile as society in general.

Addiction Statistics by Ethnicity

Race as a sociological construct can tell us something about addiction. [Rates of addiction by race](#) in the USA are broken down as follows:

- Asian-Americans had the lowest rate of illicit drug use and addiction at 3.1 percent.
- Hispanics had a rate of substance addiction at 8.8 percent.
- Whites had a rate of 9.5 percent.

- African-Americans have an addiction rate of 10.5 percent.
- Native Americans and Alaskans abused drugs at 12.3 percent.
- Multi-racial individuals had a drug abuse rate of 17.4 percent.

Addiction Statistics by Type

Alcohol Statistics. About 18 million Americans have an [Alcohol Abuse Disorder \(alcoholism\)](#) but only one-third get the treatment they need to quit. Alcohol is one of the most dangerous substances to use, as it causes prompt harm to major organs. Binge drinking, even once, can lead to fatty liver disease. Alcohol dependence produces a withdrawal syndrome that can be fatal if a person quits abruptly ("going cold turkey") and must be treated in an inpatient detoxification facility.

Tobacco Statistics. Addiction to cigarettes and other tobacco-containing substances kills about 500,000 people every year in the USA, with over [40 million Americans using tobacco](#) in one form or another. It is the number one cause of preventable death in the USA. Over 16 million Americans suffer from diseases directly caused by tobacco use.

Marijuana Statistics. Marijuana has become much more socially acceptable in the last decade. It is not known for producing a serious physical addiction. However, chronic and heavy marijuana use can lead to paranoia and severely aggravate other mental disorders, including depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. There is evidence that [marijuana abuse makes psychotic disorders much worse](#).

Illegal Substance Statistics. Illegal substance abuse refers to abusing drugs like PCP or heroin, that have no legally approved use. Abuse of drugs in the hallucinogen class does not produce addiction but can result in temporary psychoses that can be life-threatening. Heroin addiction falls within the opioid addiction category and has recently been the source of an increased number of overdose deaths, due to heroin being [adulterated with fentanyl](#).

Prescription Drug Addiction Statistics. [Commonly abused prescription](#) drugs include opioid analgesics, sleeping medications, anti-anxiety drugs (benzodiazepines), and stimulants, like Adderall.

Process Addictions

Process addiction, also called behavioral addiction, results from a compulsive, irresistible urge to perform certain complex behaviors, to such a degree that negative outcomes are inevitable. For some people, performing these behaviors causes a [release of the same brain chemicals](#) that are released by substance addiction. People who suffer from process addictions are unable to quit without treatment.

Gambling Addiction Statistics. Gambling addiction is one of the most common and well-known of all behavioral addictions. Some signs of gambling addiction include:

- Hiding gambling activities.
- Trouble reducing, controlling, or stopping gambling
- Gambling though unable to properly afford it
- Gambling even when the consequences are negative
- Conflict with family or friends because of gambling activities

Sex Addiction Statistics

Sex addiction is like all other behavioral disorders: people feel compelled to perform an action-- in this case, sexual behaviors. Sex addiction is indicated by the [following symptoms](#):

- Have recurrent, hard, or impossible to control urges to perform sexual behavior:
- The behaviors get in the way of obligations and activities like work or schooling
- Behaviors tend to occur in the presence of negative moods, like depression, anxiety, boredom, or as a response to stress.
- Attempts to stop the behavior fail
- Sexual behaviors continue regardless of the harm to interpersonal relationships or finances.

Process addiction and substance addiction are both fueled by the same neurological processes: an [unusually high release of the neurotransmitter dopamine](#) upon consuming the addictive substance or performing the addictive behavior. Although there are medications that can lower dopamine's effects, dopamine is the body's primary means of reducing pain. When its effectiveness is reduced, the body loses the ability to suppress pain.

Ghostwritten for [Online Mental Health Resources](#)