

PLAN FOR HEALTH

Addiction and Your Health



November 2023

HOW DO DRUGS WORK IN YOUR BRAIN?

Drugs interfere with the way neurons send, receive, and process signals via neurotransmitters. Some drugs, such as marijuana and heroin, can activate neurons because their chemical structure mimics that of a natural neurotransmitter in the body. This allows the drugs to attach onto and activate the neurons. Other drugs, such as amphetamine or cocaine, can cause the neurons to release abnormally large amounts of natural neurotransmitters or prevent the normal recycling of these brain chemicals by interfering with transporters. Although these drugs mimic the brain's own chemicals, they don't activate neurons in the same way as a natural neurotransmitter, and they lead to abnormal messages being sent through the network.

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG ADDICTION

People with addiction often have one or more associated health issues, which could include lung or heart disease, stroke, cancer, or mental

health conditions. Imaging scans, chest X-rays, and blood tests can show the damaging effects of long-term drug use throughout the body.

For example, it is well-known that tobacco smoke can cause many cancers, methamphetamine can cause severe dental problems, known as meth mouth, and opioids can lead to overdose and death. In addition, some drugs, such as inhalants, may damage or destroy nerve cells, either in the brain or the peripheral nervous system (the nervous system outside the brain and spinal cord). Drug use can also increase the risk of contracting infections. HIV and hepatitis C (a serious liver disease) can occur from sharing injection equipment or from unsafe practices. Infection of the heart and its valves (endocarditis) and skin infection (cellulitis) can occur after exposure to bacteria by injection drug use.

CAN ADDICTION BE TREATED SUCCESSFULLY?

Yes, addiction is a treatable disorder. Research on the science of addiction and the treatment of substance use disorders has led to the development of research-based methods that help people to stop using drugs and resume productive lives, also known as being in recovery.

CAN ADDICTION BE CURED?

Like other chronic diseases such as heart disease or asthma, treatment for drug addiction usually isn't a cure. But addiction can be managed successfully. Treatment enables people to counteract addiction's disruptive effects on their brain and behavior and regain control of their lives.

DOES RELAPSE TO DRUG USE MEAN TREATMENT HAS FAILED?

No. The chronic nature of addiction means that for some people, relapse, or a return to drug use after an attempt to stop, can be part of the process, but newer treatments are designed to help with relapse prevention. While relapse is a normal part of recovery, for some drugs, it can be very dangerous—even deadly.

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE TREATMENT?

Research shows that when treating addictions to opioids, medication should be the first line of treatment, usually combined with some form of behavioral therapy or counseling. Medications are also available to help treat addiction to alcohol and nicotine.

Additionally, medications are used to help people detoxify from drugs, although detoxification is not the same as treatment and is not sufficient to help a person recover.

HOW DO BEHAVIORAL THERAPIES TREAT DRUG ADDICTION?

Behavioral therapies help people in drug addiction treatment modify their attitudes and behaviors related to drug use. As a result, patients are able to handle stressful situations and various triggers that might cause another relapse. Behavioral therapies can also enhance the effectiveness of medications and help people remain in treatment longer.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy seeks to help patients recognize, avoid, and cope with the situations in which they're most likely to use drugs. Common forms of behavior therapy for addiction include:

- Contingency Management
- Motivational Enhancement Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Twelve-Step Facilitation

If you or a loved one are struggling with addiction or behavioral health treatment, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or contact your health plan provider.

Sharecare Featured Challenge:

A daily gratitude practice can help you become a happier, healthier person! Join the November Gratitude Challenge this November. Track for 21 days that you identified at least one thing that you are grateful for! Join the challenge by clicking **Achieve** → **Challenges** → **November Gratitude Challenge** beginning on 10/25.

Please note: The Sharecare Platform will be sunseting December 31, 2023.



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Self Care, It's Time to Take Care of You**