

HealthMatters

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Understanding Addiction



Addiction is not an indication that someone is weak. Science shows that addiction is a treatable brain disease.

What is addiction?

When someone is addicted, we often assume it is their fault, but addiction is a complex disease affecting brain function and behavior. Substance use disorder affects the brain's ability to function normally, impacting brain processes and manifesting in uncontrollable and dangerous behavior and personality changes.

Substance misuse impacts the brain

Substance misuse disrupts a part of the brain responsible for the “fight-or-flight” response. After substances wear off, this part of the brain creates a distress signal. This signal

triggers a different part of the brain that governs self-control, decision-making and problem-solving to shut down. The result is a laser focus on replacing the missing substance. People experiencing substance use disorder will compulsively seek substances because they need them to “survive” (according to their brain) regardless of the consequences. At this point, they’re not using substances to feel good – they’re using substances to feel normal.

The good news

As with other behavior-related diseases, recovery takes time and is achieved with treatment, including therapy and sometimes medication. The

good news is that since the brain is malleable, it can also heal, or recover, from the absence of the substances that caused it to change in the first place. Substance use disorder must be managed throughout one’s lifetime with proper understanding and support.

Common myths of addiction

Myth: “Addiction only happens to certain kinds of people.”

Fact: Addiction can happen to anyone, no matter their upbringing, personality type, race, or grade point average. There are genetic, social, and psychological risk factors that can put some people at greater risk—but addiction has nothing to do with a person’s character.

Myth: “Addiction is a choice! Kids should just say no.”

Fact: No one, whether they’re a teen or an adult, chooses how their brain will react to substances.

Myth: “Addiction medications are just replacing one addiction with another.”

Fact: Medications for addiction treatment, especially for opioid use disorder, have been proven to save lives and substantially improve recovery rates. For people in treatment for substance use disorders, medications ease withdrawal symptoms to give people the space they need to recover and prevent overdoses. Medications don’t create a high or cause impairment—they allow patients to work, drive, care for their families, and live fulfilling lives.

Myth: “People with addiction are hopeless.”

Fact: People can and do recover from addiction every single day. With the right treatment, recovery is possible for everyone.

There are many different types of treatments for addiction, and treatments can occur in a variety of settings. As with any chronic illness, finding the right treatment is the first step to managing your substance misuse and improving the quality of your life. Even recovery is a stage where support is helpful to stay on track and reach your full potential.

- Shatterproof
- Working Partners
- Wellness Council of Indiana

Tips for when a loved one is struggling with addiction

Realizing a loved one is struggling with addiction can lead to a variety of feelings, including sadness, anger, hurt and confusion. Remember, recovery is possible. Consider the following tips:

- Learn about addiction and its treatments from trusted sources, such as your care team.
- Carefully address the issue without looking down on your loved one.
- Set protective boundaries such as not allowing them to use the substance around you, setting curfews or refusing to bail them out of legal or financial trouble, and follow through with boundaries put into place.
- Remain a strong support for your loved one and express your belief that they can change.
- Practice your own self-care. This also enables you to better care for them.

Contact your Everside Health & Wellness team today to discuss which treatment options may be best for you.

Visit eversidehealth.com
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