

Tanner's Story

A Lifelong Battle

Tanner had a pretty rough life growing up, and no one could really fault him for it. His mother had never really been around because of her heroin habit, and his father was in and out of jail for beating them. Pushed around from foster home to foster home, Tanner never felt happy. Violent and sometimes callous, Tanner pushed away pretty much anyone who tried to get close to him—until he met Valerie. Valerie was the one person who could take his abuse and give it right back. She'd tell him he was better than that, and that he deserved to be happy like everyone else. She tried to be there for him the best way she knew how, but it never seemed like enough. Tanner had experimented with drugs as a teenager and had even spent some time in jail, and his life seemed to be going in a downward spiral.

Years later, after basically hitting rock bottom and becoming addicted to heroin, Tanner seemed to finally get his act together. He had cut ties with everyone from his past that might drag him down—everyone except Valerie. She helped him find a rehabilitation center and visited as often as she could. They both knew exactly how long it had been since his last injection, and Tanner knew how strong the desire for heroin was, even after 3 years. He knew he would have to always fight for his sobriety.

Test Yourself

- Which of the following are things a person can become addicted to?
a. Nicotine b. Alcohol
c. Gambling d. Drugs
e. All of the above
- The cerebrum is considered the brain's reward center.
a. True b. False
- What chemical in the brain is responsible for reinforcing a pleasurable act?
a. Dopamine b. Endorphin
c. Serotonin d. Glutamate
- Which of the following statements is TRUE?
a. A person who starts using drugs as a 40 year old is more likely to relapse than a person who started as a 16 year old.
b. People with physical illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, or asthma are more likely to develop a substance abuse disorder because they use alcohol to deal with these larger issues.
c. People who suffered abuse or a negative home life as a child may be more likely to develop a substance abuse problem.
d. Genetics play little to no part in determining whether or not a person will develop an addiction.
- Detox is the process of flushing out all of the drugs or alcohol from your system so that treatment may begin.
a. True b. False

ADDICTION



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1.E 2.B 3.A 4.C 5.A
Answers:



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It Can Be Beaten



So Wrong, Even If It Feels Right

What is Addiction?

Addiction is a legitimate disease, not a lack of willpower or resolve. Characterized by compulsive involvement with a particular rewarding stimulus, despite any adverse consequences, addiction is a complex issue that many people deal with. Just a couple of examples of what people can become addicted to include, but are not limited to, alcohol, nicotine, drugs, sex and gambling.



Drug Addiction

How Does It Happen?

Drug addiction occurs in the brain's reward center, also known as the nucleus accumbens. When a person does a pleasurable activity, like spending time with friends or exercising, their brain releases dopamine—which makes them feel happy. Drugs bombard the brain's reward center with dopamine, which is how people who may have become sick when they tried drugs for the first time can still become addicted.

The influx of dopamine motivates that person to repeat the action, and the overstimulation of the nucleus accumbens causes an intense, gratifying high that can lead someone to compulsively take a drug. Soon, the brain adjusts to the extra levels of dopamine by making less of it on its own or by reducing the cell's ability to respond to it. This is how tolerance begins, and why the same amount of a drug that got a person high initially may not have the same effect over time. Eventually, they may try more of the drug or a different, higher potency drug to get that same effect.

Who's at Risk? What about Me?

Anyone can become addicted to something, especially when it comes to drugs or alcohol. However, there are a lot of different factors to consider what may cause an individual to develop an addiction:

- **Age.** Younger people and adolescents' brains are not as developed as an adult's, thereby making them more vulnerable to addiction. Not only are teenagers more likely to begin using drugs than adults, they're less resistant to treatment and more likely to relapse.
- **Genetics.** Research shows that genetic factors, along with social and other psychological factors, are associated with addiction. Roughly half of a person's risk for developing an addiction is attributed to their genetic makeup.
- **Psychological.** People with mental health disorders like depression, anxiety, ADHD, or PTSD are more likely to develop substance abuse disorders because many of these people attempt to use drugs or alcohol to deal with their larger problems.
- **Environmental.** People with adverse childhood experiences—like abuse or household dysfunction—are more likely to not only suffer with substance abuse but also other health, social and behavioral problems throughout their lifespan.



Getting Help

Treatment Options

Because things like alcohol or drugs directly affect your brain, there's no such thing as "just getting over it" or "willing the addiction away." Most professionals agree that in order to be effective, pharmacological treatments have to be integrated with other forms of addiction rehabilitation, like behavioral therapy, individual or group psychotherapy, behavior-modification strategies, twelve-step programs, or residential treatment facilities. In other words, you can't just take a prescription pill and expect the addiction to just disappear. You also, unfortunately, can't just go to therapy and expect a cure, particularly because of how your brain may have been affected with the substance abuse.

Ultimately, addiction is a chronic disease, much like diabetes, asthma or heart disease, and treatment may never really offer a "cure." People who are recovering from an addiction may be at risk for relapse for their entire lives, but research shows that combining addiction medications with therapy ensure the best chances for success. Talk to your doctor so that they may make a tailored approach to treat your specific drug or alcohol abuse.

Find a Local Treatment Center Near You.

If you or your doctor think you could benefit from substance abuse treatment, there are plenty of options for you. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has a helpline to get some advice on how to proceed: 1-800-622-HELP (4357).

Addiction treatment services are often covered by health insurance, and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act ensures that co-pays, deductibles, etc. are not more restrictive for mental health and addiction benefits than they are for medical and surgical benefits.

What is Treatment Like?

The most common first step for treatment is detox, which is where all of the drugs are removed from your system. This is important because your mental ability for treatment is impaired when drugs are involved. You may experience a variety of physical and emotional withdrawal symptoms like depression, anxiety, restless, nausea, chills, or sleeplessness. Just know that treatment centers are experienced in helping you get through this process and keeping you safe. Depending on what you're addicted to, you may even get some mediations to help you feel better through drug withdrawal, making it easier to stop using.

What to Do if Someone You Love Has an Addiction.

If someone comes to you for help, they have taken a monumental step in recovery. If they are resistant to help, you can at least try to offer support by trying to convince them to talk to their doctor. There are over 3,500 physicians in the United States who specialize in addiction, so get some information about one that is close to you and leave it with your friend or loved one.

Emphasize to them that it takes a lot of courage for them to reach out for help. Let them know that their addiction can be beaten. People recover every day from addiction, so let them know they are not alone.

