

Drug addiction



Many people do not understand why people become addicted to drugs or how drugs change the brain to foster compulsive drug abuse. They mistakenly view drug abuse and addiction as strictly a social problem and may characterize those who take drugs as morally weak. One very common belief is that drug abusers should be able to just stop taking drugs if they are only willing to change their behavior.

What people often underestimate is the complexity of drug addiction that it is a disease that impacts the brain, and because of that, stopping drug abuse is not simply a matter of willpower. Through scientific advances we now know much more about how exactly drugs work in the brain, and we also know that drug addiction can be successfully treated to help people stop abusing drugs and resume productive lives.

Drug addiction is a chronic, often relapsing brain disease that causes compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences to the drug addict and those around them. Drug addiction is a brain disease because the abuse of drugs leads to changes in the structure and function of the brain. Although it is true that for most people the initial decision to take drugs is voluntary, over time the changes in the brain caused by repeated drug abuse can affect a person's self-control and ability to make sound decisions, and at the same time create an intense impulse to take drugs.

It is because of these changes in the brain that it is so challenging for a person who is addicted to stop abusing drugs. Fortunately, there are treatments that help people to counteract addiction's powerful disruptive effects and regain control. Research shows that combining addiction treatment medications, if available, with behavioral therapy is the best way

to ensure success for most patients. Treatment approaches that are tailored to each patient's drug abuse patterns and any concurrent medical, psychiatric, and social problems can lead to sustained recovery and a life without drugs.

As with other chronic diseases, such as diabetes, asthma, or heart disease, drug addiction can be managed effectively. Yet, it is not uncommon for a person to relapse and begin abusing drugs again. Relapse does not signal failure; rather, it indicates that treatment should be reinstated or adjusted, or that alternate treatment is needed to help the person regain control and recover.