



Understanding Addiction

An **addiction** (the need to use a substance or perform a behavior repeatedly) usually develops over time. So it's easy not to notice at first. But as your problem grows, your chances of losing everything important to you multiply. No one plans to be addicted and no one plans to lose his or her family, friends, job, health, and self-respect—but it can happen.

The Cycle of Addiction

You try it

When you first try an addictive substance or behavior, it's often just for fun or just by chance. Your first reaction: you feel good, more relaxed, and perhaps more popular.

You try it again

The next time you try an addictive substance or behavior, it may seem more familiar this time—like a friend who makes you feel more relaxed, comfortable, and liked.

You plan to do it

Soon you start making plans to use the substance or do the behavior. You think about it even when it's not around. And you may become attracted to people who want to do it too.

You do it more and more

When you become addicted, you take the substance or do the behavior more and more—often secretly, often alone. Now it consumes your time and energy—and interferes with your life.

Addictive Substances Include:

- Illegal drugs such as cocaine
- Legal drugs such as cigarettes, alcohol, and prescription medications
- Activities of daily life such as working, eating, and having sex
- Leisure activities such as gambling, watching television, and playing computer games

The Impact on Your life

An addiction can affect your relationships, your work, and your health. In other words, your entire life.

Your relationships with family and friends change as your habit becomes your priority. You may seek out people who share your addiction. Or you may grow distrustful of people, preferring the "company" of your addiction over that of people you know. This behavior hurts everyone around you.

Your job and relationships with coworkers are threatened when you become addicted. You may become unreliable and careless, increasing the odds of work-related accidents.

Your health is likely to decline as your problem grows. You may become increasingly confused or tired. Your self-esteem may be threatened. And, over time, your addiction could lead to serious, even fatal, illness.