

Easy-to-Read Drug Facts

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What is Addiction?

People don't plan to get addicted to drugs, but when they first take a drug, they might like how it makes them feel. They believe they can control how much and how often they take the drug. However, drugs can change the brain. Those who used drugs in the beginning to feel good, now may need to take drugs just to feel normal. They may also seek and take drugs even if it causes problems for themselves and their loved ones. Some people may even take higher doses of drugs or more of them. These are signs of an addiction, and it can quickly take over a person's life.

For some people with severe addictions, taking drugs can become more important than the need to eat or sleep. The urge to get and use the drug can fill every moment of a person's life. The addiction can replace all the things the person used to enjoy. Some people who are addicted may do almost anything—lying, stealing—to keep taking the drug.

Addiction is a long-lasting brain disorder.

- Drugs can change how the brain works.
- These brain changes can last for a long time.
- They can cause problems with a person's behavior like being moody, having memory loss, or even having trouble thinking and making decisions.

Addiction is an illness, just as heart disease and cancer are illnesses. Addiction is not simply a weakness. It does not mean someone is a bad person. People from all backgrounds (poor/rich, went to college/didn't finish school, and so on) can get an addiction. Addiction can happen to anyone and at any age, but the chances are higher when a person starts drug use when they're young. Read more about other things that make someone more likely to become addicted on the Easy-to-Read Drug Facts webpage, [What Makes Someone More Likely to Get Addicted?](#)

What are some signs and symptoms of someone with a drug use problem?

People with drug problems might act differently than they used to. They might:

- change their friends a lot
- spend a lot of time alone and choose not to spend time with family and friends like they used to
- lose interest in their favorite things
- get messy—for instance, not bathe, change clothes, or brush their teeth
- be really tired and sad
- have changes in eating habits (eating more or eating less)
- be very energetic, talk fast, or say things that don't make sense
- be nervous or cranky (in a bad mood)
- quickly change between feeling bad and feeling good
- sleep at strange hours
- miss important appointments
- have problems at work or at school



People with an addiction often can't stop taking the drug on their own. They might try to stop taking the drug and then feel really sick. Then they may take the drug again to stop feeling sick. They keep using the drug even though it's causing family, health, or legal problems. They may need help to stop using drugs.

Drug treatment can help. Read more on the Easy-to-Read DrugFacts webpage, [Drug Treatment and Recovery](#).

How Does Drug Use Become an Addiction?

Not everyone who uses drugs becomes addicted. Each person's body and brain are different. People react to drugs differently and there's no rule about how soon someone becomes addicted. It can happen quickly or take time. Your relationships, the places around you, and worries can also make you more or less likely to become addicted.

But how does taking drugs become an addiction?

Our brains want us to repeat things that we need or enjoy—like eating a good meal. That's why you sometimes eat more dessert than you know you should. That's why a little child often shouts "again!" when you do something to make them laugh.

Drugs of abuse excite the parts of the brain that make you feel good. But, after you take a drug for a while, the feel-good parts of your brain get used to it. Then you need to take more of the drug to get the same good feeling. Soon, your brain and body must have the drug to just feel normal. You feel sick and awful without the drug.

What Makes Someone More Likely to Get Addicted to Drugs?

What makes some people more likely to get addicted to drugs?

- **Your biology.** Everyone's bodies react to drugs differently. Some people like the feeling the first time they try a drug and want more. Other people hate how it feels and never try it again. Some are more likely to get addicted.
- **Starting drug use when you're young.** When kids use drugs, it can change how their bodies and brains finish growing. Using drugs when you're young increases your chances of becoming addicted when you get older.
- **Mental health problems.** People who have mental health problems such as depression, trouble paying attention, changing moods, or worrying about things, are more likely to become addicted. They might use drugs to try to feel better. Read more at the Easy-to-Read Drug Facts webpage, [Drug Use and Mental Health Problems Often Happen Together](#).
- **Hanging around other people who use drugs.** Friends or family members who use drugs may make you more likely to use drugs.



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You can call **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** at any time to find drug treatment centers in your area.

- **Trouble in school, trouble at work, trouble with making friends.** Trouble at school or work, or trouble getting along with people, can make life hard. You might use drugs to get your mind off these problems or use drugs to make friends. But true friends wouldn't ask you to take that risk.

Does Addiction Run in Families?

Genes carry information that makes you who you are. Some genes increase the chance of addiction, and these genes can be passed on to babies. Just like you can have your father's nose or mother's eyes, you can also have a parent's higher risk of addiction. So far, there aren't tests that can tell you if you carry addiction genes in your body.

But it's not all about genes. If children see a parent or family member using drugs, they might think it's okay. Kids learn behaviors by watching their parents or older brothers and sisters. Also, addiction causes a lot of problems in the house, and children don't get the care or attention they need. Children who don't feel loved have a greater chance of using drugs and becoming addicted. This can be a problem that continues through many generations. It can happen whether the family is rich, poor, or in between.

The good news is that many children whose parents had drug problems don't become addicted when they grow up. The chances of addiction are higher, but it doesn't have to happen. And you can protect yourself from this chance by not using drugs.



Why Is It So Hard to Quit Drugs?

Getting better from addiction can take time. Being addicted can make you afraid of what will happen if you don't keep taking the drug. Some people won't try quitting until they're forced to, because it seems too hard.

When someone stops using a drug, they might feel very sick for a while, and feel a very strong need to take the drug. It can be really hard to stop taking the drug when you feel that bad. To learn more, watch the video, [Why Are Drugs So Hard to Quit?](#)

Although it can be hard to get off drugs, you don't have to do it alone. Support groups, treatment programs, and sometimes medicines can help. You'll meet people who understand what you're going through, who can give you advice and cheer you on. Doctors can help you find medicines that make you feel less sick and reduce your need to use the drug. Counselors can teach you how to handle life's problems without using drugs. Visit the Easy-to-Read Drug Facts webpage [Types of Drug Treatment](#) to learn more.

After you get treatment, you still have a lot to do:

- You have to relearn how to live without using drugs.
- You have to work on the problems your drug use caused with your family, your job, your friends, and your money.
- You have to stay away from people you used drugs with and places where you used.
- You have to learn what makes you want to take drugs again, so you can avoid those things.
- You may also need treatment for problems that led to your drug use, such as feeling sad, worrying about things, or mood problems.

A **trigger** is anything that makes a person want to go back to using drugs. It can be a place, person, thing, smell, feeling, or something that happened in the past that reminds the person of taking a drug and getting high. A trigger can be something that you worry about that you want to get away from. It can even be something that makes you feel happy. People fighting addiction need to stay away from the triggers that can make them start using drugs again, just like people with breathing problems need to avoid smoke and dust.