



LIGHTER
BRIGHTER!
you.

WHAT ARE ADDICTIONS, AND CAN WE BE FREE OF THEM?

AN ADDICTION is defined as the inability to stop some sort of activity or behaviour, even if it is causing physical or psychological harm. A simple addiction, like needing a coffee first thing in the morning, is generally regarded as being normal – even though it's a sign that the body is lacking in energy. But if you can't live without it, it's still an addiction. More damaging and serious addictions, like alcohol, drugs, gambling, or pornography, cause terrible damage to the user, their family, and their community.



WHY DO PEOPLE GET ADDICTED TO THINGS?

Some people are curious about what they've been told is bad for them, others feel a sense of pressure from their peers to try new things, while others want to escape reality. Addiction is also about a lack of, or loss of meaningful connections to others because, as a species we need meaningful connections, and when we don't have them, we look for other ways to feel good about life and ourselves.

Addicts also find themselves using their addiction to reduce anxiety, as the neurochemicals released when the activity or behaviour is engaged in, offer a temporary sense of pleasure and release from unhappiness.

HOW BRAIN FUNCTIONS UNDERLIE HOW ADDICTIONS FORM

The brain is very sensitive to the ups and downs of brain messengers – neurotransmitters – which the brain uses to keep the brain functioning well, such as keeping our mood stable, allowing us to focus and concentrate when we need to, and feeling relaxed and calm.

Drugs interfere with how these messengers work and lead to exaggerated emotions/feelings. Dopamine is one

of the neurotransmitters that are impacted via drugs, and is often called the pleasure neurotransmitter, as it does leave us with a jolt of pleasure when we do something that causes its release – like enjoying a meal with loved ones or exercising. However, it's also released when we anticipate the jolt of pleasure, so the anticipation of the pleasure is also pleasurable, which further drives the behaviour to be continued.

ARE ADDICTIONS AND HABITS THE SAME THING?

When a habit starts to interfere with the quality of your life – your mental and physical wellbeing – then we can think of it as an addiction. Good habits lead to a better life; bad habits that can become addictions do the opposite. Exercise is a good example, as it is healthy in moderation, but excessive exercise damages health.



CAN WE BREAK AN ADDICTION?

Yes, we can, although it is harder to break a heroin addiction versus a coffee addiction. However, the person who wants to break free of an addiction needs the support of people who are qualified to help them. They also need to change their environment, as it's no use, for example, for a person who is trying to give up alcohol to still hang out in their local pub with friends who don't want to stop drinking.

Remember, it takes 60+ days to create a new habit, not 21, but following a nutrient-dense diet, and being supported by a qualified person, can help build good habits to replace addictions that undermine wellbeing.

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