

WHAT CAUSES DRUG & ALCOHOL ADDICTION?

Alcoholism and substance abuse disorder may be two of the least-understood diseases in the world. An unhealthy and faulty dependence on drugs and alcohol can often stem from isolation, loneliness, depression, and other mental and environmental health factors. Many non-addicts often state that a person suffering from addiction simply lacks willpower; Alcoholism and substance abuse disorder may be two of the least-understood diseases in the world. An unhealthy and faulty dependence on drugs and alcohol can often stem from isolation, loneliness, depression, and other mental and environmental health factors. Many non-addicts often state that a person suffering from addiction simply lacks willpower; if only they could “get it together” or just “cut back”, they would be alright. This is a dangerous, antiquated way of thinking and has led to the stigmatization of an entire demographic of people.



Imagine, would you get angry and dismiss the claims of a diabetic? Taking away their insulin and stating that diabetes “is a matter of will-power” would be absurd and deadly. This is what many people who suffer from AUD (alcohol abuse disorder) and SAD (substance abuse disorder) have to deal with. When an addict says that they really can’t stop, they mean it. Their brain thinks that they need the substance to survive. If only they could “get it together” or just “cut back”, they would be alright. This is a dangerous, antiquated way of thinking and has led to the stigmatization of an entire demographic of people. Imagine, would you get angry and dismiss the claims of a diabetic? Taking away their insulin and stating that diabetes “is a matter of will-power” would be absurd and deadly. This is what many people who suffer from AUD (alcohol abuse disorder) and SAD (substance abuse disorder) have to deal with. When an addict says that they really can’t stop, they mean it. Their brain thinks that they need the substance to survive.

WHAT LEADS TO SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS?

The advent of treatment and the attempts at the de-stigmatization of alcoholics and addicts is a very recent occurrence, beginning in the 1930s. Before that time – and even today – people addicted to drugs were seen as unethical and immoral. These people simply suffered from a lack of will-power, the common-sense of the times stated. This led to treatment that resembled punishment, including shock therapy, electroconvulsive therapy, and even lobotomies. These treatments would often render alcoholics and addicts in an even worse position than they were prior to the treatment.

Addiction treatment has come a long way since then, as addiction is now seen as a medical disorder that requires proper medical attention. This disorder – or disease – of the brain impacts brain function and chemistry, which ultimately modifies an addicted person’s personality, thoughts, and behaviors. While drug addiction may start off as voluntary use, many people lose control of their use somewhere down the line. It ceases to be a matter of will-power and becomes a mental, physical, and spiritual issue.

Drug abuse turns into drug addiction when a person is no longer able to control the amount of the drug they take. Many people who are addicted to drugs cannot imagine a life without their substance of choice, and do things that they would never normally do to acquire drugs and alcohol. It is often said that once a person’s drug abuse begins to seriously impact the quality of their life, and they cannot stop despite these consequences, they have crossed the threshold.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF ADDICTION:



NURTURE, NOT NATURE: The quality of life one experiences while growing up can often lead to mental illnesses such as depression, substance abuse disorder, and anxiety. Rates of addiction spike when children are exposed to alcohol, drugs, and peer pressure early in life; drug use is normalized if their peer group or parents use substances as well. If a person grows up around drug & alcohol abuse, they are much more likely to see these as normal, rational behaviors.



HEREDITARY: There is a theory that states that substance use disorders are inherited traits coded into our DNA. This would explain why some people can use highly-addictive substances, such as cocaine or opioids, without regular abuse; while others who use these same substances become hooked from the very first use.



GENETIC: There is a strong correlation between the age of first use and the rates of drug abuse. Those who begin to experiment with drugs & alcohol at an early age are more likely to develop addictive tendencies later in life. This is also a dangerous since the brain is still developing, and has been shown to prevent proper growth & development of neurotransmitters within the brain, which can lead to an inability to experience pleasure naturally.

We choose to believe that all of these factors play a part in the development of substance abuse disorder and drug addiction; however, we think that the causes of drug addiction are not as important as recovery. It is often found that mental health issues can increase the chances of addiction by 20%-50%, which is why many treatment centers treat co-occurring mental disorders, along with drug and alcohol abuse.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Since drugs can have a profound effect on the pleasure and reward circuitry within the brain, drug abuse can often reinforce negative behaviors due to a flood of dopamine when the drug is taken. Drug abuse can lead to less time spent with friends and family due to the time spent chasing drugs and getting high. These changes in behavior and social life can often lead to negative consequences such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and isolation. As drug abuse progresses into drug addiction, an addict usually begins to spend more time on obtaining drugs and less time spent on activities and hobbies that used to bring them fulfillment.

Long-term abuse can lead to a plethora of negative consequences, including changes in brain chemistry and brain function. This can include changes in behavior, mood, learning, stress response, judgment, memory, and decision making. Despite these consequences, many people who suffer from substance abuse disorder find it incredibly difficult to stop using their substance of choice.

THE BLANCHARD INSTITUTE TREATMENT PROGRAMS

If you believe you or a loved one is exhibiting signs and symptoms of drug abuse and addiction, proper medical care may be needed. The Blanchard Institute employs evidence-based therapies and effective treatment to help people recover from substance abuse disorders. We proudly use a dual diagnoses approach that blends mental health care and substance abuse treatment to create a highly effective and individualized treatment plan. Contact us today for additional information or to schedule an assessment.