


Let's Talk

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Addictions

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Addiction is defined as an inability to stop doing or using something to the point where it could be harmful to you. **Addiction is a common problem, but help is available.**

Someone experiencing an addiction will:

- display a lack of self-control and not be able to stop the addictive behaviour
- have an increased desire for the substance or behaviour
- lack any emotional response and dismiss how their behaviour may be causing problems to themselves and others

Over time, addictions can seriously interfere with the addict's daily life. People with addiction are often prone to cycles of relapse and remission. That's why it's important for anyone who is experiencing addiction to seek help as soon as possible.

According to the charity Action on Addiction, 1 in 3 people worldwide have an addiction of some kind. Addiction can come in the form of any substance or behaviour. Addiction is most commonly associated with **gambling, drugs, alcohol** and **smoking**, but it's possible to be addicted to just about anything, including:

- **Work** – some people are obsessed with their work to the extent that they become physically exhausted.
- **Internet** – as computer and mobile phone use has increased, so too have computer and internet addictions.
- **Shopping** – shopping becomes an addiction when you buy things you don't need or want to achieve a buzz; this is quickly followed by feelings of guilt, shame, or despair.



There are lots of reasons why addictions begin. In the case of drugs, alcohol and nicotine, these substances affect the way you feel, both physically and mentally. As these feelings are enjoyable this creates a powerful urge to use the substances again.

Gambling may result in a similar mental 'high' after a win, followed by a strong urge to try again and recreate that feeling. This can develop into a habit that becomes very hard to stop. For more details on how to stop gambling, read our guide [here](#).

Being addicted to something means that not having it causes withdrawal symptoms. Because these symptoms can be unpleasant, it's hard to stop. An addiction can get out of control because of the increased need to satisfy the craving and achieve the 'high'.

The strain of managing an addiction can seriously damage your work life and relationships. In the case of substance misuse, the addiction can also lead to psychological and physical health problems.

The four stages of addiction are:

- Experimentation: uses or engages out of curiosity
- Regular: uses or engages for social reasons
- Problem: uses or engages in an extreme way with disregard for consequences
- Dependency: uses or engages in a behaviour once or several times a day

Some studies suggest a person's risk of becoming addicted is partly genetic, but environmental factors, such as being around other people with addictions, are also thought to increase the risk.

Behaviours such as substance misuse can be a way of blocking out difficult issues. Unemployment and poverty can trigger addiction, along with stress and emotional pressure.

What are the signs?

Most signs of addiction relate to a person's lack of self-control. This includes changes that are:

- Social - seeking out situations that encourage a substance or behaviour, avoiding other situations
- Behavioural - increased secrecy
- Health related - insomnia, memory loss, bloodshot eyes or weight changes
- Psychological - paranoid thoughts, negative self-image, lack of motivation

Someone with an addiction may continue their behaviour, even if they recognise the problems the addiction is causing.

Getting help

Addiction is a treatable condition. Whatever the addiction, there are several ways you can seek help. You could see your GP or professional services for advice or organisations that specialise in helping people with addictions.

Your GP can assess your situation. The type of treatment a doctor may recommend will depend on the severity and stage of the addiction.

With early stages of addiction, a doctor may

recommend medication and therapy. Later stages may benefit from inpatient addiction treatment in a controlled setting.

These online directories will help you to find addiction treatment services in your area:

- [Alcohol addiction services](#)
- [Drug addiction services](#)
- [Stop smoking services](#)



Support and Sources of Information

[Action on Addiction](#)

[Samaritans](#)

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

[FRANK](#)

[Turning Point](#)

[Change Grow Live](#)

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