

Why Can't I Stop?

Dealing with addictive behavior

Addiction *n.* to devote or surrender (oneself) to something habitually or obsessively (Definition provided by the American Heritage Dictionary, 9th Edition)

Addiction is an activity or substance that an individual wants to experience, for which he/she will pay a price, sometimes a negative one. Addictive behavior commonly provides a high level of satisfaction. It creates an environment of need in the individual that cannot seem to be satisfied without that activity or substance. If an individual does not take control, eventually, the addictive behavior controls him/her.

Addictive behavior is a habit that is learned over time through a process of trial and error or personal observation. Through this process, a habit forms only if there is at least a portion of the experience that is pleasurable. Having had a positive experience, an urge or desire for the experience is begun. It is unlikely that a person will become addicted to a substance or activity that did not provide at least a small amount of pleasure.

Addictions do one of the following to the individual, either they elevate his/her mood or decrease his/her negative mood. The pleasure of the addiction can

block out an unwanted emotion or feeling. For example, if a individual is not fitting in with a group of people, he/she can change his/her behavior to match that of the group (drinking, using drugs). When used in this manner, the addiction is more of a coping response to a certain situation or circumstance that may progress into a habit.

According to Dr. Arthur Horvath, Ph.D. at the Center for Cognitive Therapy in California, there are four primary phases in a negative addiction:

1. **Experimentation**

Urges arise out of curiosity

2. **Expected enjoyment**

Urges arise out of fond memories of past enjoyment

3. **Doing it to cope**

Urges arise primarily in response to stress

4. **Doing it to survive**

Urges are frequent (doing it hourly, daily) or may be prevented more than they are experienced.

An individual may stop at a phase or go back and forth depending on how long the addiction has been a part of his/her life.

Unfortunately, an individual may not address his/her addiction because of the perceived inability to overcome the addiction. Additionally that same

individual may not be willing to identify a problem for which he/she does not have a solution. Not identifying the problem, also known as denial, is not the solution and in many cases causes the problem to get worse because the individual does not address it.

There are several factors that can influence an addiction. They include:

- Family history of addictive behaviors which may increase the risk for similar addictive behavior
- Encouragement from others
- Acceptance of the behavior by others
- Low self-esteem
- Craving for excitement/boredom
- High stress level
- Availability of substance or activity

How do I know if I am addicted?

A better question for an individual who is struggling to know if he/she is addicted may be: Is my enjoyment of this substance or activity causing me enough problems that I want to consider cutting back or stopping? Is this behavior preventing me from enjoying even better and higher pleasures?

To properly answer these questions, an individual should gain insight from others, such as family, friends, co-workers and health care professionals. More often than not, it is difficult for

Addictive Behavior

someone who is experiencing a pleasurable experience to look objectively at his/her potential addiction. Taking time to learn about the specific addiction that an individual thinks he/she may be suffering from is important to ensure that he/she understands the risks to his/her emotional, physical and psychological risks.

There are numerous symptoms that can accompany an addiction, they include:

- Stop doing normal activities that do not include the addiction
- A preoccupation with the substance or activity
- Loss of self-respect
- Extended periods of attempting to ignore or minimize the problem
- Blowing out of proportions the actual benefits of the addiction

What are things that someone could be addicted to?

There are several recognized forms of addiction. The most commonly thought of is chemical dependency; however, there are several additional forms of addiction that can have a highly negative impact on an individual's life. Addiction is the equivalent to being intoxicated or drunk. It impairs perceptions and judgments causing more problems indirectly related to the addiction.

Some common forms of recognized addiction may include:

Spending Addiction – In the United States, the estimated credit card debt is six hundred billion dollars, that is \$600,000,000,000. An individual who is suffering from a spending addiction pays whatever it takes to get whatever



he/she wants. With the heavy use and ease of obtaining credit cards, an individual with this addiction believes that he/she can go on forever. There is a sense of control when spending credit, not money, on everything that an individual desires. In many cases, the purchases are not necessarily useful or needed. This form of behavior can

eventually lead to financial ruin and bankruptcy.

Sexual Addiction – An individual that experiences this addiction is willing to do anything to anyone to fulfill his/her desire for a sexual high. There are an estimated six million websites that are devoted entirely to sexual activity. This

Addiction Self-Help Test

The following is a listing of ideas that can help deal with an addictive behavior. It is an adaptation of the Effectiveness of Coping Behaviors Inventory by Gloria Litman. Not all the questions will apply to all addictions, so only answer the questions that apply. Mark the response that best describes the effect that each action has based on the following rating scale:

0 – Usually stops me; 1 – Sometimes stops me; 2 – Usually does not stop me; 3 – Do not know

The statements with the lowest scores are the best tools for starting to deal with your addiction.

1. ___ Thinking about how much better off I am without (Insert Addiction)
2. ___ Telephoning a friend
3. ___ Keeping the company of non (Insert Addiction)
4. ___ Thinking positively
5. ___ Thinking of the mess I have got myself into through (Insert Addiction)
6. ___ Stopping to examine my motives and eliminating the false ones
7. ___ Thinking of the promises I have made to others
8. ___ Staying indoors - hiding
9. ___ Pausing and really thinking the whole (Insert Addiction) cycle through
10. ___ Knowing that by not (Insert Addiction) I can show my face again without fear or what others will think
11. ___ Going to a meeting with people who have the same addiction as yourself
12. ___ Recognizing that life is not a bed of roses but (Insert Addiction) is not the answer
13. ___ Realizing that it is not worth it
14. ___ Remembering how I have let my friends and family down in the past
15. ___ Keeping away from people who do (Insert Addiction)
16. ___ Looking on the bright side and trying to stop making excuses for myself
17. ___ Realizing it is affecting my health
18. ___ Start doing something else in the house/office
19. ___ Considering the effect it will have/is having on my family
20. ___ Reminding myself of the good life I can have without (Insert Addiction)
21. ___ Getting in touch with people who have overcome (Insert Addiction) up my mind that I am not going to continue playing games with myself
23. ___ Avoiding places/circumstances where I (Insert Addiction)
24. ___ Thinking about all the people who have helped me
25. ___ Saying I am well and wishing to stay well
26. ___ Trying to face life instead of avoiding it

free rush of images and information provides an easy source of material. Additionally, this addiction may take the form of flirting, wearing revealing clothing or engaging in extramarital affairs. Eventually, this behavior will lead to an inability to build long-term relationships and damage or destroy present relationships.

Gambling Addiction – An individual that faces this addiction believes that regardless of the circumstances, he/she is due to win if he/she plays enough. From casino games to office pools to lottery tickets, this addiction causes the individual to experience extreme highs when winning and excessive lows when losing. The odds of winning a lottery are approximately one in one hundred and forty-two million (1 in 142,000,000). Despite these long odds, the individual with this addiction may ignore his/her chances of losing to focus on the small chance of winning. Excessive gambling can lead to financial and relationship failure.

Eating Addiction – An individual that struggles with this addiction tends to think about eating or not eating all the time, using or not using food to fill an emotional need. Generally, eating addictions are seen in women; however, numerous men struggle with this addiction. The individual usually has a very low self-esteem, hates the way he/she looks physically and is attempting to fill a void in his/her life. Without care, this addiction can lead to serious physical problems such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

Work Addiction – An individual with this addiction believes that nothing can be done properly without his/her direct action. In addition, they believe that his/her only sense of worthiness is gained from his/her work. The individual

Addictive Behavior

thinks that if time is taken off from work people may discover that he/she is not the person that he/she wants everyone to believe he/she is. In the end, the individual's social and family life are damaged or destroyed and his/her emotional and physical health may greatly deteriorate over just a few years of this addiction.

Codependency – An individual that has this addiction believes that everyone else's needs must come before his/her own. The individual may keep score on who owes him/her what for the things he/she has done for them. This addiction can be an attempt by the individual to make others more like himself. Eventually, this addiction can cause increased pressure on the individual or cause the individual to misinterpret emotions which can permanently injure relationships and hurts others.

Perfection Addiction – An individual with this form of addiction believes that everything that he/she does must be flawless, nothing less will appease him/her. Socially, this is considered an exceptional trait until someone else works with the individual and learns that reasonable accomplishments are unacceptable. This brings forward the problem of no one being able to meet the standards that he/she demands. Disappointment and frustration may begin to set in and the individual eventually might begin to believe that only he/she is right. If left untreated, this addiction may cause higher levels of anxiety and damage relationship.

Exercise Addiction – An individual who suffers from this addiction will push his/her body to the absolute maximum potential to accomplish the emotional high. Like perfection, many in society do not see the bad part of this

addiction; however, like perfectionism, it can cause the individual to exceed his/her abilities and skills leading to injury. It produces a sense of self-righteousness in that he/she is out doing something, not just lying on the couch being lazy. Exercise also produces a high level of chemical changes that scientists believe may be the reason some athletes turn to pain medications after an injury or when they are no longer able to compete. Over time, this condition can cause physical problems as well as leading to other addictions.

Thrill Addiction – An individual who has this addiction is unable to enjoy anything but the most dangerous activities. From jumping off of buildings and cliffs to driving fast or running a red light, this form of addiction produces a high only when there is a perception of risk or danger. After a while, the individual risks serious bodily damage or financial burdens because of his/her actions.

All of these addictions can cause embarrassment and are painful to the person suffering from them. They destroy an individual's ability to make sound decisions. In the end, the addiction takes over the person, he/she feels in control but is not. He/She is completely under the influence of the addiction, surrendering control to the addiction.

Overcoming an addiction is basically a decision that an individual must make on his/her own. After identifying that the addiction is taking a portion of his/her emotional, physical, spiritual and/or intellectual life, he/she should seek outside help from an emotional and behavioral health care professional or an addiction support group in your area. For more information, please contact the CARELINE at (800) 662-1002.

Understanding Co-Dependency

Codependency is a reliance on someone or something, which affects all facets of an individual's life. According to the National Council on Codependency, there are several signs that an individual may be suffering from codependency. The following statements designed to help identify some of the signs of codependency.

Low Self-Worth

- I am uncomfortable when others compliment me or give me gifts
- Criticism and disapproval easily hurt me
- My desire to do things perfectly leads me to procrastinate

Controlling Behaviors

- I have difficulty expressing certain emotions (anger, love, fear, grief)
- I have trouble having fun without drinking or getting high
- I have a hard time accepting my mistakes

Pleasing Behaviors

- I compromise my own values and integrity in order to be accepted by others
- I feel guilty when I say no
- I volunteer to do things that I do not want to do

Relationship Issues

- I believe in love at first sight
- I find that people who are nice to me are boring
- I feel that I am incomplete when I am not in a relationship

If you or someone you love exhibits these symptoms, please contact the CARELINE at (800) 662-1002, or you may attend the **Codependency Education Support** group which meets Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. at Mountain View Hospital or log onto our website at www.mtnviewhospital.com for more information.