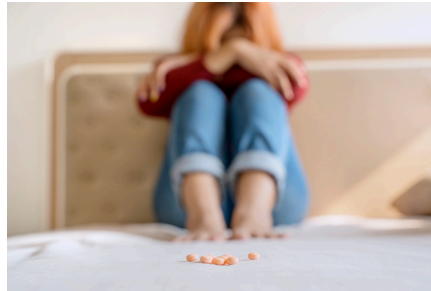


Addiction 101: Understanding How Addiction Works



What is Addiction?

Addiction is a chronic disease that affects the brain and body, leading to compulsive substance use despite harmful consequences. It is not simply a matter of willpower or moral failing--addiction changes brain chemistry, making it difficult for individuals to stop using substances without help.

How Addiction Develops

Addiction typically begins with voluntary substance use, but over time, repeated exposure to drugs or alcohol alters the brain's reward system. The brain begins to associate substance use with pleasure and relief, making it harder for individuals to resist cravings. Factors such as genetics, environment, trauma, and mental health conditions can all increase the risk of addiction.

The Brain and Addiction



Addiction primarily affects three key areas of the brain:

- **The Reward System (Dopamine Pathway):** Drugs and alcohol trigger the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure. Over time, the brain requires more of the substance to feel the same effects, leading to dependence.
- **The Prefrontal Cortex:** This part of the brain is responsible for decision-making and impulse control. Addiction weakens its function, making it harder for individuals to make rational choices about substance use.

- **The Amygdala:** This region regulates emotions and stress responses. Individuals with addiction often experience heightened anxiety and distress when not using substances, reinforcing their dependence.

Physical and Psychological Effects of Addiction

- **Physical Effects:** Changes in heart rate, blood pressure, liver damage, weakened immune system, and neurological impairment.
- **Psychological Effects:** Increased anxiety, depression, paranoia, mood swings, and cognitive impairment.
- **Behavioral Effects:** Isolation, lying, secrecy, financial problems, and neglect of responsibilities.

Signs of Addiction



Recognizing the signs of addiction can help individuals and their loved ones seek help early. Common symptoms include:

- Increased tolerance (needing more of the substance for the same effect).
- Withdrawal symptoms when not using.
- Loss of control over substance use.
- Neglecting responsibilities, relationships, or hobbies.
- Continued use despite negative consequences.

Can Addiction Be Treated?

Yes! Addiction is a treatable disease, and recovery is possible with the right support. Common treatment approaches include:

- **Detoxification (Detox):** A medically supervised process to safely remove substances from the body.
- **Therapy & Counseling:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Motivational Interviewing, and other evidence-based therapies.
- **Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT):** FDA-approved medications to help manage withdrawal symptoms and cravings.
- **Support Groups:** 12-Step programs (AA, NA) and non-12-step options like SMART Recovery.
- **Sober Living & Aftercare Programs:** Transitional housing and continued support to maintain long-term sobriety.

Breaking the Stigma



Many people struggling with addiction face stigma, which can make seeking help more difficult. It's important to understand that addiction is not a choice--it's a medical condition that requires treatment, compassion, and support.

Getting Help

If you or a loved one is struggling with addiction, know that help is available. Jeffrey's Mission provides:

- Scholarships for sober living and treatment programs.
- Family support groups to help loved ones navigate addiction recovery.
- Educational resources for individuals in recovery.

For more information or support, contact us:

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Jeffrey's Mission: Turning Loss into Action, One Life at a Time