

# Managing Addictions



Addiction is a recognised illness that affects the way the brain functions. It refers to a pattern of frequent habits, despite them having negative consequences.

It's about the way your body craves a substance or behaviour, especially if it causes a compulsive or obsessive "reward" and a lack of concern over consequences to your health, or family and friends. Those who become addicted to drugs or alcohol do not make a conscious decision to develop an addiction that could ultimately destroy their lives. It is a very misunderstood illness, and there is still a certain amount of stigma attached to it.

## What causes addiction?

It is easy to say that alcoholics and drug addicts should simply stop drinking or taking drugs. But it is never that easy.

Not every person who drinks alcohol or takes these drugs will develop an addiction. Some of us are at greater risk of developing this illness due to factors including: a family history of addiction, mental health problems, our socio-economic status, unresolved trauma, and early exposure to chemical substances.

## It's in the brain!

The frontal lobe in your brain allows you to delay feelings of reward or gratification, but if you're addicted to something, the frontal lobe malfunctions, and gratification is immediate.

## Spotting the signs:

Someone experiencing addiction will:

- be unable to stay away from the substance or stop the addictive behaviour
- display a lack of self-control
- have an increased desire for the substance or behaviour
- hide their behaviour from others
- dismiss how their behaviour may be causing problems
- lack an emotional response
- experience health related problems such as insomnia or memory loss

Someone with addiction won't stop their behaviour, even if they recognise the problems the addiction is causing.

## What sort of things can you get addicted to?

1 in 3 people in the world have an addiction of some kind. Addiction can come in the form of any substance or behaviour. The most well-known and serious addiction is to drugs and alcohol.

The most common drug addictions are:

- nicotine, found in tobacco
- THC, found in marijuana
- opioid (narcotics), or pain relievers
- Cocaine

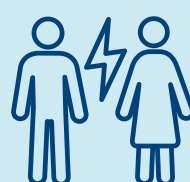
But it's not just drugs and alcohol! You can also get addicted to:

- coffee or caffeine
- social media
- gambling
- anger, as a coping strategy
- food
- technology or gaming
- sex
- work

## The four stages of addiction:

Addiction will often play out in stages. Your brain and body's reactions at early stages of addiction are different from reactions during the later stages.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
<b>experimentation:</b> uses or engages out of curiosity	<b>social or regular:</b> uses or engages in social situations or for social reasons	<b>problem or risk:</b> uses or engages in an extreme way with disregard for consequences	<b>dependency:</b> uses or engages in a behaviour on a daily basis, or several times per day, despite possible negative consequences



## What are the complications?

Addiction that's left untreated can lead to long-term consequences. These consequences can be:

- physical, such as heart disease, HIV/AIDS, health concerns and neurological damage
- psychological and emotional, such as anxiety, stress, and depression
- social, such as jail and damaged relationships
- economic, such as bankruptcy and debt



## How do you treat addiction?

All types of addiction are treatable. The best plans are comprehensive, as addiction often affects many areas of life. Treatments will focus on helping you or the person you know stop seeking and engaging in their addiction.

Common therapies include:

- medications, for mental disorders such as depression or schizophrenia
- psychotherapy, including behavioural, talk, and group therapies
- medical services, to help treat serious complications of addiction, like withdrawal during detox
- addiction case manager, to help coordinate and check ongoing treatment
- inpatient addiction treatment
- self-help and support groups

You can also visit your GP for an evaluation. The type of treatment a doctor recommends depends 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.

## Managing Addictions TOP TIPS

1. Letting your friends, family, and those closest to you know about your addiction and treatment plan can help you keep on track and avoid triggers.
2. Join or contact a support group or online forum.
3. Make things easier by not putting yourself in situations that might trigger your addiction. Triggers can include people, places and times.
4. Identify some good distractions
5. Start a journal or keep a list visible of the benefits of stopping your addiction, these might be social benefits, financial ones etc.

## Further resources

Overcoming addiction is a long journey, but support is out there in a number of forms, should you need it:

### Alcohol addiction

- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- [Alcohol self-assessment tool](#)
- [MyDrinkaware App | Drinkaware](#)
- [Support for alcohol or drug problems / Health and social care / Hampshire County Council](#)

### Drug addiction

- [Narcotics Anonymous](#)
- [Cocaine Anonymous](#)
- [Crystal Meth Anonymous](#)
- [Marijuana Anonymous](#)

### Gambling

- [Gamblers Anonymous](#)
- [Self exclusion from Gambling](#)
- [National Gambling Helpline – 0808 8020 133](#)

### Social Media and Gaming

- [Social Media Addiction](#)
- [Gaming addiction support](#)

Further information is also available on the [NHS website](#)

## Need extra support?

Don't forget if you've noticed changes in the way you're thinking or feeling over the past few weeks or months that concern you or cause you distress, you can always consider going to see your GP or alternatively speak to someone from our employee assistance support networks.

**Fleet:** Visit the Medical Centre or contact your [Crew Assistance Programme \(CAP\)](#)

**Shore:** Speak to your GP, [Occupational Health](#) or [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#)



Our [Mental Health First Aiders and Champions](#) can provide support and signpost you to additional help if and when you need it.

