

Addictions Stemming from Stress or Pain Management

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The majority of people who live with some type of addiction never set out to become reliant on whatever it is that they use. An addiction can happen as a way of trying to cope.

But what an addiction does is it only masks what's really going on. If you're someone who's struggling with stress or pain, you don't have to be put in a position of having to choose an addiction just to make it through your day.

Once you identify the stressors or your pain, you can seek the appropriate help and not only feel better, but you can break the addiction as well. Most people choose to break an addiction because of the way it impacts their lives emotionally, financially and in relationships.

Stress Is a Leading Factor in Addictions

Stress means something different to everyone who experiences it. Stress can be caused by outside influences and can be short-term stress such as job problems, a family situation, moving, financial pressures, or an argument.

Some stress is long term - such as day-to-day living with a stressful situation that's not going to get better for months or years - like being a caretaker, having a bad job you can't change, or the death of a loved one.

Stress can also be caused by health issues. Low levels of certain hormones can contribute to stress. Stress can be in someone's life but not be constantly on until something triggers it.

When the trigger kicks in, you may feel the physical side effects of stress. These side effects include feeling like there are knots in your stomach,

higher blood pressure, rapid heart rate, insomnia, stomachaches, headaches and fatigue.

You might have emotional side effects of stress including anxiety, depression, and mood swings - especially anger or irritation. Dealing with or eliminating the stress can be the first step in helping you manage an addiction.

If the stress is not dealt with before an addiction treatment plan is put into place, there's a stronger chance that there will be a relapse. What happens whenever stress occurs is that if a person is already overwhelmed, overloaded or their coping mechanism has been depleted, they turn to an activity or a substance for relief.

It often doesn't matter what the activity or substance is as long as the person feels that it eases the stress. The problem is that whatever relief they feel is only temporary.

Since the stress relief is associated with the activity or substance, they have to continue to engage in the activity or use the substance. After a while, what happens is that the relief they feel is no longer there.

Their body has become accustomed to whatever it is they're doing to find relief. So, then the person has to up the stakes. They have to do more of the activity - like some people turn to exercise as stress relief.

While exercise is good, if used as a stress relief rather than dealing with the cause of the stress, the exercise can take on unhealthy proportions. This is how someone with an eating disorder can become addicted to exercise.

It's the same way with any substance. A little might help ease the stress in the beginning, but before you know it, you have to take more and more of it just to find the same level of relief.

There are several common addictions that occur when people seek to ease stress or find an outlet for physical or emotional pain.

Smoking Can Be a Stress Relief and Pain Management Addiction

Having an addiction to smoking is one way that begins as a means to manage stress. Once you get a nicotine habit, it can be easy to turn to that whenever you feel stressed.

Most people think that having a cigarette calms them whenever they feel their stress levels start to go up. But the truth is that the opposite happens. Smoking causes stress levels to go up rather than down.

What gives smokers the sense that they're getting relief from stress is that the nicotine they're getting into their system from a cigarette quiets the craving rather than the stress they experience.

It gives a false sense of relief. This false sense of relief comes from the nicotine because this addictive substance causes a person to experience a temporary mood lift.

Nicotine makes the emotional aspect of stress less sharp. Smokers don't feel the same level of irritation, the anger or the depression brought on by stress when they smoke, not realizing that it's not a true release from the stress.

Dopamine is behind the mood lift that someone feels whenever they smoke. The nicotine causes the release of this chemical and makes the smoker instantly feel calmer.

The nicotine opens the doorway to a habit forming method of stress relief that's not even a true relief. Smoking covers up the stress but doesn't deal with it. This addiction has the same results if used as a way to attempt to deal with pain.

A nicotine habit is not an effective pain management solution because eventually the nicotine need will change. After the initial dopamine release wears off, the smoker will crave another cigarette to get the same calmness and the same relief from pain that he or she felt in the beginning.

This is how someone goes from being a one or two cigarette a day person to becoming a pack a day smoker. Healthy coping skills are needed to break an addiction to smoking.

Once you stop smoking, you cut your risk of smoking related health problems and can reverse health problems that may already be happening in your body such as high blood pressure or elevated heart rate and higher liver enzymes.

If you want to break the addiction to cigarettes, there will never be the "right" time. Some people look for a time when they don't feel they'll have any stress at all in their lives, but stress can be a given and putting off stopping smoking until things "get better" doesn't work.

Instead, if you stop smoking in the middle of your stress, you stand a greater chance of successfully quitting. Otherwise, when the stress reoccurs, you'll face an even greater temptation.

Make it easy to break the addiction by making your environment one that will help you succeed. Don't have any cigarettes on hand, don't hang out where you used to smoke and use some stop smoking tools if you need them - such as the patch or nicotine gum.

Drinking Is One of the Top Five Addictions

Of the most addictive substances - alcohol - makes the top five list. It's also one of the most accessible substances to those who are underage. While a lot of people do drink alcohol, most people do understand limitations and don't have an addiction to it.

There are clear signs that an alcohol addiction is present. Having an inability to do what you're supposed to do during the day is a sign. For example, if you can't do your job duties, or you're failing in your college level schoolwork because of drinking, this can be a sign of an addiction to alcohol.

When you have to consume great quantities of alcohol to find the same relief from stress or pain than you have in the past, this can be a sign of an

addiction. The reason that your body needs more alcohol the more of it that you use is because it builds up a tolerance to a certain level.

So as you drink it, you have to have more and more before you can feel the same level of buzz that you did in the beginning. If you've tried to stop drinking, but experience signs of withdrawal when you attempt it, that can also be a warning sign.

Symptoms of withdrawal include mood swings - anxiety, irritability, depression, insomnia, headaches and feeling shaky. While the discomfort from stress or pain can be covered up with alcohol, as soon as the buzz wears off, the feelings of stress and any physical pain that you had will come rushing back.

Plus, you'll have the after effects of health problems. Your liver can't metabolize great quantities of alcohol. When you drink too much, your body's immune system is affected.

RX Pill Addiction Can Happen to Anyone

There are so many ways to get medications. You can get them over the counter and you can get them via a prescription. Though prescription medications are more closely monitored than they have been before, it can still be easy to develop an addiction to medication.

Often, a pill addiction starts out because the medications are needed. After an injury, a doctor will often prescribe a narcotic. Narcotics are extremely addictive. They not only block out the body's pain receptors and make the user feel relaxed, but they also ease stress so you feel happy.

Other than alcohol, this is one of the quickest ways to become addicted to a substance. Some people may find it easier to become addicted than others will. This factor depends on whether or not there is a genetic inheritance toward addiction.

Once the pill is taken, there can be a mass release of endorphins stimulated by the taking of the drug. These endorphins are what give the

user the high feeling. But as the person continues to take the drug, what happens is that the brain ceases to perform its normal function with endorphin release.

So when the person who is addicted doesn't take the pill, he doesn't feel as good and his emotions swing downward. Once he takes the pill again, it creates that endorphin effect and this effect is massive.

The brain doesn't naturally produce the quantity of endorphins that are created by the drugs. Stopping a pill addiction can lead to stress, insomnia, depression and suicidal thoughts.

Treatment programs can break a pill addiction if you recognize that you have one. Some of these treatment methods include taking medication such as methadone.

Sexual Addictions Are Still Under-Diagnosed

Because there's more of a stigma around a sexual addiction, most people who are addicted to sex are reluctant to seek help to free them from this addiction. Having a sexual addiction occurs because of the same reasons that any other type of addiction happens.

The brain has a reward pathway that occurs with addictions. It's the same type of chemical release that happens when someone drinks, smokes, overuses food or takes drugs.

The behavior leads to the release of chemicals in the brain that make a person feel good. This chemical high is what leads people back to the very same actions time after time because the brain grows accustomed to that reward system.

Your brain can be retrained to accept thoughts and behaviors that a person wouldn't normally act upon. The same reasons that people use other addictions are the reasons that a sexual addiction is used.

When someone has a sexual addiction, they use it to find relief from the stress they haven't learned how to cope with, from physical and

emotional pain - and because they become addicted to the high they get from the brain's chemical release.

Like with other addictions, there can be a genetic link to sexual addictions. If this issue runs in your family (which you are likely *not* to know about), then it can get passed down to you.

Food Addiction Is the Most Common Addiction

While it can be easy to think that alcohol, cigarettes and pills are the most common addiction, it's actually food that tops the list. It's the most widely accepted addiction as well as the one that's sometimes hidden until the weight starts to pile on.

A food addiction can be just as bad for your health as any other addiction due to the long-term health problems it can cause. While some people will gain weight due to a food addiction, not everyone does.

Some people hide a food addiction by eating small portions in front of other people and then binge eating at home. With others, it can lead to an eating disorder such as bulimia or anorexia.

The reason for this is because the food is used as a means of treating stress, physical pain and emotional wounds or traumas. A food addiction also gives the same high that other substances do - and it, too is followed by feelings of disgust, remorse and depression just like other addictions can bring on.

There Is Hope for Addiction Recovery

The first step toward recovery is always the most difficult because it means acknowledging the problem. Recovery doesn't happen just because family or friends want it to - it has to come from the person with the addiction.

Some people avoid even the *thought* of seeking help because they assume this means going to some kind of recovery center. But some addictions can be treated with self-help materials, with private support

that doesn't involve public meetings, with medications, with counseling and more.

An addiction can happen to anyone at any time - from any walk of life. No one is immune or above it happening to them. The best reason to seek help for any kind of addiction is that you deserve to live an authentic life and addictions rob you of that.

Instead of an authentic life, you end up with a synthetic one because the emotions and experiences aren't real. They're being governed by the addiction. You're worth whatever tools you need to buy - whatever avenues you need to take to be free of the control of an addiction.



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