

Addiction

What is addiction?

There are many myths about addiction. To prevent addiction — or recognize the signs so it can be treated — it's important to understand what addiction really is. Part of this is also knowing what addiction is *not*.

What addiction is NOT:

- **It's NOT a moral failing.** Addiction can cause behaviors that a person regrets, but this is the effect of the addiction itself, not a lack of morals.
- **It's not limited just to alcohol, pain medication (like opioids), or illegal drugs.** A person can have an addiction to a variety of behaviors. A few examples include gambling, bulimia (eating and purging), and pornography.
- **It's NOT the same as dependence or tolerance with opioid pain medications.** Over time, your body can adjust to opioids so you may need a higher dose or you may have withdrawal symptoms when the medication is stopped. See page 2 to learn about dependence and tolerance with opioids.

What addiction IS:

Addiction IS a disease that affects how the brain processes rewards, motivation, and memories — and it causes symptoms that affect a person's body, mind, and spirit. Addiction causes a person to seek reward or relief in an unhealthy way through a behavior or substance. Addiction can cause strong cravings and a loss of control — it feels impossible to stop, even when the substance or behavior causes problems. It can affect a person's emotional responses. It can also keep a person from recognizing problems with behaviors or relationships.

A person with an addiction can have times of **remission** (when it seems to be under control) and **relapse** (beginning the addiction again). However, if addiction isn't treated, it gets worse over time. Untreated addiction can lead to disability and even death.



Addiction is a disease that affects the brain. It causes symptoms that affect the body, mind, and spirit. Addiction is treatable — if you or someone you love has signs of addiction, talk to your doctor.

What are the signs of addiction?

Symptoms that may signal addiction are listed below:

- **Feeling the need to "cut down"** or feeling guilty about the behavior or substance
- **Other people annoying you** by criticizing the substance or behavior
- **Strong cravings** for the substance or behavior — or needing it to start the day or get through the day
- **A loss of control** over behavior, emotions, or thoughts
- **Continuing the substance or behavior even though it causes negative consequences** — problems with work, activities, relationships, or health

If you see any of these symptoms in your life, or if someone you love has them, it's important to get an evaluation to see if addiction is present. See the next page to learn how addiction is diagnosed and treated.

How is addiction diagnosed?

There is no blood test or imaging exam for addiction. To diagnose addiction, a doctor will evaluate you by asking questions and comparing the answers with specific criteria. Here are some things to keep in mind about the evaluation:

- **Be honest.** The questions might seem personal, but it's important to answer honestly. Your safety is at stake.
- **Bring a friend or family member if you can.** It might be helpful to help to get the viewpoint of someone who knows you well.
- **Write down your questions.** Writing questions for the doctor ahead of time helps you remember to ask them.

How is addiction treated?

There are several options for addiction treatment. What's best for you will depend on your circumstances, how your addiction affects you, and other factors. You and your doctor will decide the best solution for you. Your treatment might combine two or more of these options:

- **An addiction treatment program.** Treatment programs involve therapy and education. They aim to give you the skills you need to stop the behavior or substance and avoid a **relapse** (beginning the addiction again). Programs can be inpatient (where you stay in the hospital) or outpatient (where you go home every night). In many cases, treatment programs also include family members for part of the therapy.
- **Counseling with an addiction specialist, psychiatrist, or psychologist.** Counseling helps you gain the skills needed for recovery, and it may also help you cope with difficult life situations and relationships. Counseling can happen one on one or with a group, and may involve family members.
- **Withdrawal medication.** You might have medication to ease symptoms that can occur when you stop taking an addictive substance.
- **A self-help group.** Self-help groups often use a 12-step program based on the model used in Alcoholics Anonymous. There are self-help groups for many different addictions. In a self-help group, members gain strength and knowledge from each other.

Who can I contact about treatment?

- Intermountain Dayspring: (801) 408-5580
- Salt Lake Assessment and Referral: (801) 468-2009
- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator:
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov
- Alcoholics Anonymous of Utah: www.utahaa.org



When I decided to ask for help, I had a lot of fears. I worried it might be embarrassing. I worried I might go through withdrawal. And frankly, I was afraid of living without my addiction.

Recovery is a challenge. But looking back, I can see it's the best decision I've ever made. I'm getting my life back.

Opioids: dependence and tolerance

Opioids are prescription pain medications that affect how your brain processes pain. Examples include codeine, hydrocodone, and oxycodone. Because of the way these medications affect the body and brain, opioids can cause two effects: dependence and tolerance. Neither of these is the same as addiction.

- **Dependence** means your body has adapted to the medication, so you may have withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly. These symptoms can include cramps, diarrhea, achiness, sweating, or restlessness. To help prevent these, your doctor will have you "taper off" the medication when it's time to stop.
- **Tolerance** means that over time the medication doesn't work as well, because your body has adapted to your current dose. If you feel your body is building a tolerance, tell your doctor. Your doctor can change your prescription or add another strategy to your plan.

The risk of opioid addiction is low for most people, but it may be higher for people with risk factors. Risk factors include addiction in your family history, tobacco use, certain mental health conditions, and trauma or abuse earlier in your life. If you are prescribed opioids for pain, your doctor can assess your risk and take steps to lower your chance of addiction.