



MYTHS ABOUT RECOVERY

MYTH # 1: Addiction is a choice.

Addiction is a medical condition. The likelihood of a person developing an addiction involves genetics, type of exposure to drugs, traumatic experiences, childhood experiences, mental health conditions, and environment.

Addiction changes the circuitry of the brain and can cause physical dependence for many. These brain changes affect the reward pathway of the brain, causing intense cravings and affecting the impulse control center of the brain. This makes it difficult for someone to stop using drugs or alcohol. Many people need life-saving medications and other treatment in order to stop using.

MYTH # 2 Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) is just switching one addiction for another.

Medication-Assisted Treatment is a commonly used expression that means a person takes medication to treat their substance use disorder. These life-saving medications do not “assist” a person’s addiction treatment, they are the foundation of it. With MAT, a patient can benefit from counseling provided at a flexible schedule, based upon patient’s needs and preferences. Two examples of MAT are methadone and buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid use disorder.

MYTH # 3 Relapse means failure

Relapse is part of recovery and abstinence is not always the goal. Like other illness like diabetes or asthma, it may take some time for a person to recover. This does not always mean the treatment is not working.

Addiction, like other illnesses, often includes periods of relapse or return to use. In conjunction with counseling relapse can be used as a learning experience. For many people it may take months or years for a person to stop using for long periods of time. In the case of opioid use disorder, even if a person continues to use opioids, the medication will reduce risk of overdose death by 50%, will often lead to reductions in use, and will reduce drug-related harm and suffering. Every recovery journey is different.

Citation: <https://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1550>

MYTH # 4 People with addiction need to hit rock bottom

Addiction is a treatable illness that does not require “hitting rock bottom” to be effectively treated. The sooner a person accesses treatment for their substance use disorder, the less likely their addiction will cause them harm and suffering. By reducing drug related harm and support from family, friends, and addiction professionals can improve outcomes for people with substance use disorders.

Myth # 5 If you become pregnant, you should stop taking medications for addiction treatment

Methadone and buprenorphine treatment is the gold standard for pregnant people with opioid use disorder. Remaining on these medications throughout pregnancy is essential for the health and well-being of the mother and the baby. After the baby is born, they will be safely and slowly weaned off of the medication under the supervision of medical professionals. There is no evidence that infants remember this process or are affected by it.

Myth # 6 Going to an inpatient patient treatment facility is the only way to treat addiction.

Research shows that there are many paths to recovery. Outpatient treatment also is an effective form of treatment for substance use disorders. Using life-saving medications like methadone or buprenorphine for opioid use disorder has better rates of recovery than traditional “detox” treatment. People using substances that can cause life-threatening withdrawal, such as alcohol and benzodiazepines (ie Klonopin and Xanax) may need inpatient treatment for withdrawal management before starting an outpatient treatment.

The overdose rate after people leave detox is the same as that of people who do not go to detox. Only medications for opioid use disorder show a large effect for overdose prevention and retention in treatment. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2760032>

Myth # 7 People with addiction just like “getting high.”

Substance Use Disorders often develop when a person is seeking an escape from a trauma. Using drugs or alcohol regularly can change the chemistry of a person’s body so that they do not feel normal or well when they do not have that substance in their system. People with opioid use disorder will often use opioids just to avoid getting sick from opioid withdrawal. People with alcohol use disorder will often use alcohol to avoid seizures, anxiety, and hallucinations from withdrawal.

Closing Thought: Addiction is a treatable medical condition. If you realize that you have a problem with substance use, seeking treatment may help you.

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