



**tip** Could you have a problem with alcohol?

Alcohol is one of the most common addictions. Answer the following questions. If you answer "yes" to two or more, talk with your doctor. You may have a problem with alcohol. Help is available.

1. Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
2. Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
3. Have you ever felt guilty about your drinking?
4. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning?

Visit Alcoholics Anonymous at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).

**Health & Wellness topics**

- » [Healthy living and well-being](#)
- » [Family health/Children's health](#)
- » [Fitness/Nutrition/Weight](#)
  - » [Fitness](#)
  - » [Nutrition](#)
- » [Men's health](#)
- » [Women's health](#)
- » [Mind matters](#)
- » [Focus on: Asthma](#)
- » [Focus on: Cancer](#)
- » [Ask the Doctor](#)
  - » [Question 1](#)
  - » [Question 2](#)
- » [News You Can Use](#)
  - » [On guard](#)
  - » [Benefits Coverage](#)

**Update your preferences**

Life changes and health interests change, too.

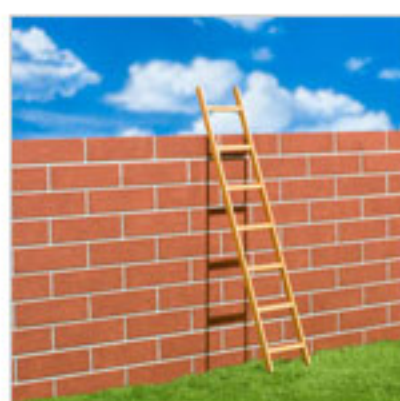
- ➔ [Update your health category selections in the Preference Center](#)
- ➔ [Share your Success Stories](#)

**Mind matters**

Current Article

**Drug addiction: Breaking free**

Most addictive drugs target the brain's reward center. As a result, large amounts of a chemical messenger called dopamine flood the nerve circuits. This leads to feelings of intense pleasure. But, as the high wears off, a person wants to take the drug again and again.



Over time, the brain adapts to dopamine surges by making less of it. The number of dopamine receptors in the brain also may shrink. Then, a person has to take the drug just to feel normal. In order to get high, you must take increasing amounts of a drug.

**The consequences of addiction**

As the addiction spirals out of control, it may lead to:

- Depression, anxiety and even suicide
- Traffic accidents caused by driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Risky behaviors, such as unprotected sex or careless driving
- Brain damage, seizures, heart disease, cancer and death
- Infections, such as hepatitis and HIV/AIDS, from sharing needles or having unprotected sex
- Legal trouble, such as being arrested for possession of illegal drugs
- Relationship problems, such as domestic abuse or divorce

Others suffer, too. Babies born to addicted mothers may:

- Be premature and underweight
- Suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome
- Be born addicted to drugs

Children of addicted parents may be abused or neglected. These children are at greater risk of developing drug problems than others. They also may have learning disabilities and behavioral problems.

Spouses may feel afraid or angry and neglect their own health. Families also suffer financially when the addicted person spends money on drugs.

**Reclaiming your life**

But, there's good news. Medicine and counseling can help, and a combination of the two often works best.

**Medicine** can ease withdrawal symptoms that often occur when a person stops using drugs. This part of treatment is sometimes referred to as detoxification, or "detox."

**Behavioral therapy** is a type of rehabilitation that helps people recognize and avoid situations in which they're likely to use drugs. These can include:

- Being with friends who do drugs
- Places where drugs and alcohol are available

People also learn new ways to cope with feelings and triggers, such as anger and stress, without resorting to drug use.

As with other chronic conditions, people with drug addictions may slip and use drugs again. But, a relapse doesn't mean treatment has failed. Instead, medical treatment or therapy can be adjusted for a better chance at recovery.

To find a drug or alcohol treatment program near you, use the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator. It's sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Visit [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov), or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

**When teens need help**

Find more information and resources at [myuhc.com](http://myuhc.com). Click "Look Up Health Topics" and type "teen substance abuse" in the search field.

**Mind matters**

Previous Articles

- » [Obsessive-compulsive disorder: Overtaken by unwanted thoughts \(PDF\)](#)
- » [Suicide: You can be a lifeline \(PDF\)](#)
- » [Secrets of a happy marriage \(PDF\)](#)
- » [Social anxiety disorder: Beyond shy \(PDF\)](#)