

## What is Addiction?

There are two types of addiction, physiological and psychological. In physiological addiction, an individual is addicted to a substance on which his body has grown dependent. When the individual ceases to use the substance, they begin to experience symptoms of withdrawal. Symptoms of withdrawal can be painful and frightening. Withdrawal can result in a variety of real physical symptoms such as rapid heart rate, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pains. Tolerance is often seen in long term addiction. Tolerance is the body's need to acquire more of the substance in order to reach the former level of relaxation or energy.

In psychological addiction, the individual may or may not be physically addicted to a substance. The process of practicing the addiction is the source of comfort or "high". Psychological addiction includes sexual addiction, gambling, internet addictions, video game or phone addictions, shopping and spending addictions, work addictions, relationship addictions and food/eating addictions. Despite the impact on work and relationships, individuals will go to great lengths to calm the severe stress and anxiety that occurs with the absence of the substance or behavior to which they are addicted.

It is not uncommon to see unresolved issues extending back to childhood underlying the need to practice addiction. Although deeply hidden, addictions are often related to the need for perfection, imposed by ourselves, others, or our culture, and the resulting feelings of inadequacy and fear. When we believe that we should be perfect, dishonesty becomes a daily practice. The belief is: "If I can't be perfect, at least I can look/act/pretend that I am." Because of the dishonesty, we eventually become confused, uncomfortable, and unable to process emotional states. Addictions are practiced primarily to alter moods. When we are unable to process, experience, or express our emotions, we develop a need to "change" the emotion through the practice of addiction.

### **Key components to addiction treatment include:**

Awareness: You can't change anything when unaware of it. Whether the addiction is physiological or psychologically, it is important to call it "addiction".

Identifying triggers to the addiction: Addictive behavior is triggered by events leading to unpleasant emotions or moods. The events can be external (things that happen to us) or internal (beliefs and thoughts we have about ourselves and our lives).

Identifying alternative behaviors: Identifying the trigger allows you the capacity to choose alternative, healthier, behaviors. If the triggers are primarily internal, you can develop the capacity and skill to change your thinking.

Developing emotional competency: Emotional competency allows us to identify our emotions, sit with them, trust them, be informed by them, express them, and eventually allow their dissipation. Emotional competency decreases the fear of emotions and the need to run from them.

Changing unhealthy thinking patterns: The unhealthy thinking patterns we adopt are often an underlying cause of negative emotional states and moods. When you develop the capacity to choose healthy thoughts, you will find less need to practice addictions to alter moods.

**Medication can help alleviate underlying depression and anxiety, but psychotherapy is important in the treatment of addiction.**