

Treatment Approaches for Drug Addiction

NOTE: This is a fact sheet covering research findings on effective treatment approaches for drug abuse and addiction. If you are seeking treatment, please call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for information on hotlines, counseling services, or treatment options in your State. Drug treatment programs by State also may be found online at www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

Drug addiction is a complex illness characterized by intense and, at times, uncontrollable drug craving, along with compulsive drug seeking and use that persist even in the face of devastating consequences. While the path to drug addiction begins with the voluntary act of taking drugs, over time a person's ability to choose not to do so becomes compromised, and seeking and consuming the drug becomes compulsive. This behavior results largely from the effects of prolonged drug exposure on brain functioning. Addiction is a brain disease that affects multiple brain circuits, including those involved in reward and motivation, learning and memory, and inhibitory control over behavior.

Because drug abuse and addiction have so many dimensions and disrupt so many aspects of an individual's life, treatment is not simple. Effective treat-

ment programs typically incorporate many components, each directed to a particular aspect of the illness and its consequences. Addiction treatment must help the individual stop using drugs, maintain a drug-free lifestyle, and achieve productive functioning in the family, at work, and in society. Because addiction is typically a chronic disease, people cannot simply stop using drugs for a few days and be cured. Most patients require long-term or repeated episodes of care to achieve the ultimate goal of sustained abstinence and recovery of their lives.

Too often, addiction goes untreated:

According to SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 23.2 million persons (9.4 percent of the U.S. population) aged 12 or older needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem in 2007. Of these individuals, 2.4 million (10.4 percent of those who needed treatment) received treatment at a specialty facility (i.e., hospital, drug or alcohol rehabilitation or mental health center). Thus, 20.8 million persons (8.4 percent of the population aged 12 or older) needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem but did not receive it. These estimates are similar to those in previous years.¹