

Factsheet: **Addiction**

Addiction is defined as not having control over doing, taking or using something to the point where it could be harmful to you. You can be addicted to many things including smoking, drugs, gambling, sex, exercise, gaming or shopping. All of these can affect the brain in the same way, you get a high following a gambling win for example and an urge to recreate that feeling which develops into a habit.

Am I addicted?

- ▶ Do you find you need to take or do more and more to have the same effect?
- ▶ Do you find yourself becoming preoccupied with the activity - when you will next do it, how it will feel, how much you will take?
- ▶ Are you unable to have or manage clear thought processes, or can only focus on this one activity to the detriment of all else in your life?
- ▶ Do you no longer have the interest or enthusiasm for things you once enjoyed?
- ▶ Do you continue to pursue the activity though it is causing problems in your life and relationships?
- ▶ Have you tried to give up but have not been able to succeed in the long term?
- ▶ Do you have withdrawal symptoms or unpleasant feelings when you have not taken part in the activity for a while?

If you answer yes to two or more of these questions this could indicate that you are addicted. Support for those wanting to beat any addiction is readily available

Treating drug dependency

Drug addiction, whether to illegal drugs or over-the-counter medicines is a medical issue, and your first port of call should be your GP. Treatment involves dealing with both the physical and psychological effects, and can be a very stressful time. You will need to confront and resolve your underlying problems and learn to cope without a drug that was once central to your life. - Accessing support from trusted family, friends and colleagues can be immensely valuable to your recovery.

Depending on the type of drug, the degree of your addiction and your attitude, outpatient treatment or even voluntary attendance at a self-help group run by an organisation such as **Narcotics Anonymous (NA)** www.ukna.org can be effective. Some people may need Inpatient treatment in hospital or at a residential rehab facility. It is possible to be admitted to a centre privately but this can be expensive.

On admission to a centre, if you are physically dependent on a drug, you will first need to undergo detoxification, which involves replacing the drug with a prescription medicine and gradually reducing the dose. This may take around two weeks, and is usually followed by an intensive programme of group work and individual counselling. This encourages you to recognise the issues that led you to become dependent, and to develop your self-esteem and positive attitudes. Therapists at both outpatient and inpatient centres have often been treated for drug dependency themselves, so they can empathise and act as convincing role models.

Prescription and over-the-counter drugs

Whenever you are prescribed a medicine, ask your doctor whether it is addictive, whether it has side effects or contraindications, whether it can be taken with medication you already take, how long you will need to take it for, and whether there are any alternative treatments. If you find yourself regularly purchasing over-the-counter medication you should consider whether you are feeding an addiction.

Other treatment for addictions

Treatment for addiction can include CBT, Counselling, and support groups. You may find the following links helpful.

For information on alcohol addiction see our alcohol factsheet

DRUGS drug addiction services www.services.drugs.ie and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) www.ukna-ireland.org

GAMBLING Gamblers Anonymous www.gamblersanonymous.ie
Problem Gambling www.problemgambling.ie
Gam-Anon www.gamanon.org.uk

OTHER ADDICTION Stop Smoking Services www.quit.ie/i-want-to-quit
Sex addiction www.saireland.com
Eating disorders www.bodywhys.ie

For more information on alcohol addiction, see our [alcohol factsheet](#).