

CLOSE TO HOME

DEALING WITH
drug
addiction





When the pain doesn't go away

Jane's nightmares kept her from getting a good night's sleep. "They are just terrifying," she told her doctor. "I wake up almost every night. It's like someone is suffocating me—like a body lying on top of me—I'm holding my breath—just shaking with fear!"

"I think we can help with that," said Dr. Shenk. "Let's try this new sleep medication to see if that helps."

Jane, married and the mother of two sons, began taking the pills every night. The relaxed feeling they produced reminded her of the way she felt in college after having a couple of drinks.

When her prescription ran out, Jane began to mix vodka into her Diet Coke—a daily ritual. Eventually, though, Jane went to see several doctors, mainly to ask for more sleep medication.

Jane would spend time with her women friends at church. With them, Jane pretended that the sexual abuse she experienced as a teen was "all in the past." She was too ashamed to tell even her best friend. "After all," she reasoned, "it was my own fault and it's time to let bygones be bygones."

Sleeping pills became her escape from the pain. There was a lot to hide: her drug and alcohol habit, and past sexual abuse. She lived in fear of being found out, especially by her teenage sons, who liked to tease her about being "a little out of it."

Then she experienced a back injury at work, which required strong painkillers. When those ran out, marijuana became her crutch until she could find a new doctor who would give her yet another prescription.

At sixteen, Jane's son was arrested for smoking marijuana. Sitting in the police sta-



tion, all she could do was to pray, “Help me, God. Please help me and Jason.”

Jason’s arrest was a wake-up call to Jane, and it opened some doors to healing. As she sat in drug awareness groups that she and Jason were court-ordered to attend, she discovered a new world of openness. These people talked about all their problems—even sexual abuse.

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One day while visiting with her best friend from church, Jane started talking about the pain and the drug abuse she’d hidden for so long. “I’ve never shared this with anyone at church. I know Jason and I both have a long journey ahead of us,” she said.

Today Jane belongs to a 12-step addiction recovery group, and she sees a therapist to deal with her emotional pain. Occasionally, she still has the nightmares, but she’s chosen a better way of life that includes God and her church friends. Today Jane continues to build a life free of denial, one of hope and restoration.

The road of recovery and forgiveness is a lifelong journey, but Jane is committed to doing whatever it takes to manage her addiction. Her friends have covenanted to pray for her, and she feels the strength of their support.

What is drug abuse and drug addiction?

Drug *abuse* is the use of any drug—prescription, over-the-counter, or illegal—in unhealthy ways, leading to social, physical, emotional, and job-related problems. *Addiction* develops when a person becomes chemically and psychologically dependent on the continued abuse of drugs.

The addictive power of drugs varies, depending on the substance and on the person's set of risk factors (see page 5). Some addictions develop more quickly than others, depending on the drug and the person.

Categories of drug use

- 1. Experimentation.** Influenced by other people or the media, a person uses a drug out of curiosity about its effects. There may be *no ongoing pattern of use*.
- 2. Abuse.** A person continues using a drug despite negative consequences. He or she has a *pattern of use*.
- 3. Addiction or dependency.** A person is *compulsive* in his or her abuse of a drug. The user builds up a tolerance to the drug and needs more and more of the drug to achieve the same result. If the user quits, her or she may experience withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, irritability, restlessness, or sleeplessness.

Drug addiction and the brain

Drug addiction is a disease that involves changes in the structure and function of the brain. Over time, the changes can affect a person's self-control, memory, learning, and ability to make good decisions.

Drugs disrupt the way nerve cells normally send, receive, and process information. Of all



the drugs that are abused, nearly all target the brain's reward system by flooding the circuit with dopamine: a neurotransmitter in regions of the brain that control movement, emotion, motivation, and feelings of pleasure. Overstimulating the system “teaches” people to repeat using the drugs.

Risk factors

No single factor can predict whether a person will become addicted to drugs. The more risk factors are present, the greater the chance that taking drugs will lead to addiction. These factors include:

- **A lack of skills in dealing with stress.** Drugs can be an escape from facing the challenges of life.
- **Personal history.** Past experience of personal trauma can drive people to drug abuse.
- **Mental health.** Psychiatric disorders can diminish one's resistance to abusing drugs. People who are depressed often use drugs in an attempt to self-medicate.
- **Biology.** Genes—those characteristics that run in families through the generations—predispose some people to addiction.
- **Environment.** This includes the modeling of family and friends; pressures around wealth or social status; or situations of poverty or family dysfunction.
- **Developmental stages.** The earlier in life the drug abuse begins, the more likely it is to progress to addiction.

Biology and environment, working closely together, account for about half of a person's vulnerability to addiction.

Drug abuse, the Bible, and the Christian story

The first chapter of the Bible describes how human beings were created in God's own likeness. God declared humanity and all of creation to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Almost from the beginning, however, our downfall as humans has come through pleasure-seeking behaviors or unhealthy ways of dealing with our brokenness. Adam and Eve's attraction to the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3) was much like the lure of drugs in today's society. Drugs change mood, levels of awareness, perception, and sensations.

Like Adam and Eve, many drug users go into hiding, ashamed of what they have done or who they have become. In fact, they may use drugs to help them hide—to try to become someone they are not, or to hide something they're ashamed of.

Healing involves uncovering what is hidden, changing the inner person, and confronting the compulsive behaviors through a course of treatment. The prayer of Psalm 51:10, 12 expresses the longing of many who want to escape the trap of addiction: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit."

In Jeremiah 31:1-40, God paints a colorful picture of the restoration to the health that God wants for each of us. Even though God's people live as exiles in a foreign land, God promises them that their life will become "like a watered garden." Their mourning will be turned into joy. It doesn't matter how far we've strayed from God; our Creator longs for our physical and spiritual recovery.



Recovery is an ongoing process

If you or someone you know is struggling to overcome drug abuse or addiction, the apostle Paul's words in Romans 12:1-2 say much about the recovery God intends. Transformation, Paul says, begins with the "renewing of our minds." We have the power to choose "what is good, acceptable and perfect." Recovery requires a daily recommitment to follow the way of Christ with God's help.

A decision to leave drugs behind, however, goes hand in hand with finding treatment. Addiction is, after all, a disease, and the recovery may be a long and slow process. The body and emotions must be retrained to function without the drugs.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (Matthew 7:7). This is a promise to claim repeatedly during recovery. Gaining freedom from the trap of abuse and addiction requires us to look to God and others for help to overcome flawed thought patterns and behaviors.

As that happens, the healing presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit is with us at every step.



Steps toward healing



or anyone struggling with a drug addiction, the following are important steps toward recovery:

- 1. Know that you are not alone.** No one feels more alone in a crowd than someone with an addiction. The disease isolates its victims in their sense that they are second-rate. In reality, others struggle too, and caring people are ready to share the burden.
- 2. Come into the open.** Acknowledge that you are addicted and that you need help. Go to a loved one, friend, physician, or spiritual mentor and let them know that you want to face the problem. Loved ones may be shocked or disappointed at first, but they will most likely be glad to know about your struggle and to walk with you. Ask them to pray for you, support your goals, and encourage you during your recovery process.
- 3. Seek the right professional help.** Find people certified to provide treatment for drug abuse and addiction. Your physician or your pastor can point you to such people. Look for qualified therapists who will support your spiritual journey as well.
- 4. Invite family and friends to participate in your recovery.** Your loved ones and fellow church members may need to be educated and encouraged in order to help you defeat the patterns of dysfunction, denial, and codependency.
- 5. Educate yourself.** The recovery program you choose depends on factors such as your personality, the kind of drug(s) you have used, the program's concept of spirituality, mental and physical illness that may accompany your addiction, and local availability and affordability. So learn

all you can. Talk to staff at your local recovery center. Attend group meetings or classes. Learn about addiction (some resources are listed on page 10).

- 6. Stay the course.** Your recovery may be a lifelong process that includes several treatment programs. Keep grounded in your walk with God and in a faithful community that helps you stay focused on your healing journey.

If your loved one is addicted to drugs . . .

- Recovery is much more effective when family members are involved and have realistic, yet optimistic, expectations about the process. The earlier you can encourage your loved one to get help, the more likely treatment and recovery will succeed.
- Talk with the person at a time when he or she is not under the drug's influence.
- Avoid an angry or dramatic intervention. Stay calm.
- Express your comments with nonjudgmental caring and concern.
- Avoid labeling the person an "addict" or "alcoholic."
- Talk about specific incidents (for example, "You were recently arrested for driving under the influence.>").
- Stick to what you know firsthand, not hearsay.
- Talk in "I" statements, explaining how the person's behavior has affected you (for example, "I felt scared when you came home high last night.>").
- Be prepared for denial, resentment, and rejection.
- Be supportive and hopeful about change.



For further awareness

Websites

www.na.org

www.drugfree.org

www.drugabuse.gov

www.ccsa.ca

Books

Berger, Allen. *12 Smart Things to Do When Booze and Drugs Are Gone*. City Center, MN: Hazelden, 2010.

Miller, Merlene et al. *Learning to Live Again: A Guide for Recovery from Chemical Dependency*. Independence, MO: Herald House, 1982.

Sims, Kecia C. *Loving the Addict, Hating the Addiction*. Lincoln, NB: iUniverse, 2003.

CATEGORIES OF DRUGS	Examples	Effects
Depressants	alcohol marijuana hashish Valium	intoxication or withdrawal, sedation, drowsiness, dependence, trembling
Stimulants	amphetamines cocaine nicotine	pupil dilation, restlessness, paranoia, mental/physical depression
Hallucinogens	marijuana LSD mescaline	pupil dilation, hallucinations, altered body concept, loss of appetite
Inhalants	aerosols glue paint thinner cleaning fluids	exhilaration, confusion, loss of balance, drowsiness, depression, hallucinations, frequent coughing
Narcotics	morphine analgesia methadone codeine Darvon Dilaudid	slurred speech, drowsiness, constricted pupils, poor coordination, fever, vomiting, cramps, chills, runny nose, tearing

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CLOSE TO HOME



**Local resources for help with
drug addiction:**

**For more information on other Close to Home
titles, go to:**

www.mennomedia.org/closetohome



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