



Understanding Treatment and Recovery

What is the difference between substance abuse and addiction?^{1,2}

Substance abuse is a disorder that involves the problematic use of alcohol and or drugs. A major symptom is a pattern of use that leads to significant impairment in functioning. It is characterized by use that persists even in the face of negative consequences to users and others.

Substance dependence (sometimes referred to as “addiction”) is a disorder that includes among its symptoms not only substance abuse but also an increase in tolerance as well as withdrawal when the substance is no longer being used. For many people, addiction becomes chronic, with relapses possible even after long periods of abstinence.

The path to drug addiction begins with the act of taking drugs. Over time, a person’s ability to choose not to take drugs can be compromised. Drug seeking becomes compulsive, in large part as a result of the effects of prolonged drug use on brain functioning and, thus, on behavior.

What is treatment?³

Drug treatment must help the individual stop using drugs and maintain a drug-free lifestyle, while achieving productive functioning in the family, at work, and in society. Treatment varies depending on the type of drug and the characteristics of the patient. The best programs provide a combination of therapies and other services.

Drug addiction treatment can include behavioral therapy (such as counseling, cognitive therapy, or psychotherapy), medications, or their combination. Behavioral therapies offer people strategies for coping with their drug cravings, teach them ways to avoid drugs and prevent relapse, and help them deal with relapse if it occurs. Case management and referral to other medical, psychological, and social services are crucial components of treatment for many patients.

What kinds of drug treatment exist?

Among the many forms of drug treatment, some of the most common include:⁴

- **Short-term** methods last less than 6 months and include residential therapy, medication therapy, and drug-free outpatient therapy.
- **Longer-term** treatment may include, for example, methadone maintenance outpatient treatment for opiate addicts and residential therapeutic community treatment.
- **Maintenance treatment for heroin addicts** – an oral dose of a synthetic opiate is provided (usually methadone hydrochloride or buprenorphine) to prevent the effects of heroin and establish a stable state without physiological cravings. The patient is better able to remove him/herself from drug-seeking and related criminal behavior and, with appropriate counseling and social services, can become a productive member of his or her community.

- **Outpatient treatment** – does not include medications. This type of treatment encompasses various programs in which patients visit treatment providers regularly. Most of the programs involve individual or group counseling. This type of treatment is not usually appropriate for opiate users who would benefit from maintenance therapy. Users who have stable, well-integrated lives and only brief histories of drug dependence often receive this type of treatment.
- **Therapeutic communities (TCs)** – structured in-patient programs that usually last from 6 to 12 months and are designed to help resocialize users. Users with relatively long histories of drug dependence, involvement in serious criminal activities, and seriously impaired social functioning often receive this type of treatment.
- **Short-term residential programs** – often referred to as chemical dependency units, and often based on the “Minnesota Model” of treatment for alcoholism. This type of treatment usually involves a 3- to 6-week inpatient treatment phase followed by extended outpatient therapy or participation in 12-step self-help groups, such as Alcohol Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or Cocaine Anonymous.
- **Drug treatment programs in prisons** – this type of treatment has been shown successful in preventing patients’ return to criminal behavior, particularly if they are linked to community-based programs that continue treatment when the client leaves prison. Some of the more successful programs have reduced the rearrest rate by one-fourth to one-half.

What is recovery?⁵

Treatment is merely the beginning of the long-term process of recovery. More than simply abstinence from the use of alcohol or illicit drugs, recovery is a self-directed process involving biological, psychological, social, and spiritual health.

The recovery process occurs as people gain awareness and manage their behavior in terms of: (1) abstaining from alcohol and drugs; (2) separating from negative influences and establishing social networks supportive of recovery; (3) stopping self-defeating behaviors; (4) learning to manage feelings and emotions responsibly; (5) learning to change addictive thinking patterns; and (6) identifying and changing mistaken core beliefs that promote irrational thinking.

¹ American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision*.

² National Institute on Drug Abuse. (1999). *Principles of Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide*. Retrieved January 27, 2005, from <http://www.nida.nih.gov/PODAT/PODATindex.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ NIDA. (2006). *NIDA InfoFacts: Drug Addiction Treatment Methods*. National Institute on Drug Abuse. National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved July 26, 2006, from <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/TreatMeth.html>.

⁵ Gorski, Terence T., John M. Kelley, Lisa Havens, and Roger H. Peters. (1993). *Relapse prevention and the substance-abusing criminal offender: Technical assistance publication series 8*. Rockville, MD: Dept. of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, p. 9.