



Am I addicted?

Recognising you have an addiction is a lot harder than you might imagine. In today's dopamine driven society, the number of recognised addictions is growing, and the number of people struggling is on the increase.



Arguably, there is no single cause to an addiction, rather a collection of causes acting in combination. These are likely to include genetics, personality, up-bringing, trauma, current lifestyle and environment, and existing stressors. Addiction has a significant impact on the brain's motivation, memory, and reward functions. Behaviour is hijacked and addicts can feel as if they have no control over themselves or their urges.

There is often considerable shame felt about engaging in addictive behaviours and embracing a compassionate approach to addiction goes a long way in identifying the underlying issues and then taking appropriate steps towards healing.

A good way to think about addiction is any type of behaviour or activity that is seeking to alleviate internal pain or discomfort and has negative consequences. These negative consequences could be guilt and shame, or could impact health, wellbeing, ability to function, and relationships.

Early warning signs

Addictions can range from substances including alcohol, nicotine, drugs, and medications, and behaviours, including gambling, working, video games, shopping, pornography and sex.

Early signs that you may be developing an addiction can include:

- increased experimentation
- feeling increasingly drawn to a substance or behaviour
- a family history of addiction
- actively seeking out situations where you can engage in the behaviour
- bingeing or loss of control with minimal remorse after

Identifying personal changes

As you move from greater experimentation or habit towards a pattern of addiction, there are going to be a number of changes to external personality and potentially health as well. Some of these signs might include:

- Reduced interest in hobbies and leisure activities
- Neglecting relationships
- Missing deadlines at work
- Taking more risks than normal
- Taking less interest in your own wellbeing and appearance

Health & physical changes

- A change to sleep patterns or difficulty sleeping
- Fluctuating moods
- Cognitive impairment, including memory and attention problems
- Changes in weight
- Irritability
- Increased anxiety and depression
- Increased susceptibility to colds and other viruses
- Changes in speech patterns or slurred speech

If you notice any of these changes, it is important to seek medical advice. If there is not a medical explanation, there is an increased possibility of an underlying addiction issue.

The longer the addiction goes on, the greater the possibility of longer-term consequences. Taking steps to address the issue earlier will serve you well. If you think you might have an addiction or know someone who does, seek professional advice. Your GP is a good first call, but there is plenty of free advice out there!

“

When you can stop, you don't want to. And when you don't want to stop, you can't. That's addiction.