

TREATMENT

“I’m the type of person that once I start using, there is no, well, I’m going to go to detox. I have to be locked up. And if I’m not locked up, I will continue until some very big disaster happens.”

The reasons that people give up their compulsive use of psychoactive drugs vary, but they almost always include survival.

“In the middle of the night I, I realized I, I, I, I don’t want to stop but I have to or I’m going to die. And I made a phone call and that phone call I was willing to hear the answer... The answer was surrender really. It’s just, just to, to, to, to give up my way of doing my things selfishly. Do something a, a different way that works.”

“This time I, I was done. I mean I, I couldn’t take any more. I could not put anymore bad memories inside my head and I figured well, let me just give this a try and let’s see how it works out.”

“I wanted to see my daughter again or be with her so I went to outpatient treatment but still thinking once I get out of treatment I’m going to drink and do drugs again, if that’s what I want to do, you know and had no intention of being sober for good but after a few months it just, it worked.”

When addicts decide to stop using their drug of choice...or favorite compulsive behavior, and enter treatment, they go through 4 phases:
detoxification,
initial abstinence,
long-term abstinence
and recovery.

“I’ve been through a, King county. I don’t know if they still do it but King county used to have a detox facility that they would detox alcoholics and drug addictions, give you 7 days to detoxify. I did that several times. I never had the resources to go through a hospital stay or anything like that.”

Users going through detoxification may try doing it cold turkey, but they may require medical or pharmacological assistance, and they often need emotional support.

“Detox is different for everybody. Some people say it takes them 24 to 48 hours in detox. It took me about three months of detox and what I mean is getting over the physical cravings that I had for alcohol.”

“In that early state of recovery you know, when we’re first trying to get clean, we think it’s just all about the physical. I am separated from the booze and alcohol and I’ll be fine and then you realize, well I still have this mental obsession with it. That’s why people keep relapsing.”

“Relapse isn’t really that much about will power it’s about what has happened to the brain with addiction, the brain with its memory response becomes

hypersensitive to drug triggers and those drug triggers can lead to slips and slips can lead to relapse. To better understand this hypersensitivity maybe it's useful to think of it sort of it like an allergy. A, say like an allergy to a bee sting.

If someone with that allergy gets stung, they react, they swell up, and they can't breathe. It doesn't matter if they are moral or immoral, sane or insane, they will react badly. Their life will be threatened. A similar life threatening reaction happens with an addict who has become sensitized to a psychoactive drug or compulsive behavior. They are also allergic. If they come in contact with Meth, Vicodin, Alcohol or a slot machine, and use even once, they will break out in craving, they will break out in slips, they will break out in a relapse.

"It's alcohol, it's always with alcohol, when ever I had a problem or any type of argument or disagreement, blussey blah, blussey blah, alcohol was always was a problem.

The main difference between the two allergies is that people, who are allergic to bees, don't play near a beehive. This is because their memories only consist of the bad things that happened to them when they got stung. Whereas with addictions they have good memories as well as bad memories. So even if addicts' lives are in shambles, they still have a strong tendency to recall the good memories first, which then trigger the reward pathway and lead to relapse.

Allergy, I, I, I don't know what you want to call it, allergy, poison, what ever it is, it just don't work for me, that's all I know.

A number of medications such as Suboxone or methadone are being used to reduce withdrawal symptoms during detoxification.

"Boy, it seems like a huge oxymoron, that you would use medications to treat drug addiction or you, you use drugs to treat drug addiction, but the science of, of understanding addiction has improved to the point that we can understand the intricate neurochemistry, the intricate function of the brain, and it's given scientists the opportunity to develop medications that would go in there and disrupt the processes that lead a person to continue using their drug and rob them of the ability to stop using."

"Oding's not the scary part. It's living. It's getting through that first couple months of getting off the drugs and surviving that because you're literally insane. You're not; you're like, so raw. There's no defenses."

"Everyday is a struggle. It's not so much that, that I want to drink, but I still got all that, you know, that past that, that still eats at me and the only thing I can do now is, is to continue just going to my meetings, doing what I'm supposed to do, because this is a life or death situation for me."

Initial abstinence, the second phase, of treatment, means following a course of action to avoid relapse, including active, rigorous counseling.

“Well what this exercise is going to do is to allow you to create new neural pathways or new automatic thoughts. And it will help you in the relapse process.”

Also included during initial abstinence is the continued use of anti-craving medications such as naltrexone, acamprosate, or varenicline, and utilizing the larger recovery community, including Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, outpatient clinics, halfway houses, residential treatment facilities, and therapeutic communities.

“I tried; I had many attempts to try to get sober on my own and could never accomplish it. Um, yeah, since I’ve been doing the step work, I’ve had no relapse.”

“It takes willingness. You have to be willing to change. And I was. Cause I was desperate. I was so desperate that I had to change or else.”

“And I went to one on ones with my counselors, every week . . . actually twice a week . . . because I had to; I had to talk to somebody. It was; it was hard to realize that I could not ever drink again.”

Another problem during initial abstinence is overconfidence.

“I relaxed. You know, I stopped doing, you know, the, the exercises. I stopped going to meetings and ‘cause I figured, Okay, I’m all right . . . I you know, I really don’t need it, so I think I can go ahead and deal with it and then I got into a stressful situation and I picked up a joint and smoked it, and a, a, which got me back here.”

Long-term abstinence is maintained by continued attendance in self-help groups and creating one’s own support network.

“So having a support system and somebody that will take you to a meeting, I think that’s really important, like I still can’t figure out how or why they work but I know that they do work.”

Long-term abstinence also means addressing past emotional traumas, dysfunctional relationships, or chaotic family systems.

“The abuse and the molestation was a contributing factor for me using drugs, so when I decided to um, that, that wasn’t working any longer, drug use was not working, it was either going to be, you know death or prison for me or else cleaning up, um, I knew that that was one issue that I would have to resolve and put it behind me without thinking about it and having it bring the pain that it has brought in the past.’

“One of the reasons why so many people don’t get this and and get drunk because they, they don’t want to deal with their past. Who wants to deal with their past. You know, if we stop and look at some of the things we’ve done, unless we’ve been saints and martyrs, we’ve all done bad things in our lives.”

“We are such good blamers. It’s everybody else’s fault, it’s my grandfather’s fault that I’m using drugs, it’s my mother’s fault, it’s my father’s fault . . . it’s everybody’s fault but Sonya’s, and until I take responsibility for my own addiction, I’m going to get loaded.”

Long-term abstinence means dealing with financial problems and educational or work needs, and it means treating psychiatric, dental, and medical problems.

“When I, I first tried to get sober, Dr. Theresa Brooks, gave me um, Paxil I believe it was, yeah, 10 grams, 10 milligrams of Paxil, and that gave me enough, brought me up enough to where I could keep from picking up the very first drink because like a say, they were getting into my drinking, I was drinking just to feel better and it was killing me.”

“As I’ve gotten older, medical problems started to happen. I have hep C. I had a, as a result of a, an altercation with a, two detectives I had my ribs broke and my lung punctured and almost died from that.”

Again, medications can support long-term abstinence.

“As these medications get approved, Varenicline say for nicotine, Suboxone for opiate addiction, naltrexone in a depo form to treat alcoholism, acomprosate, things like that that come about, it is giving us another tool, another resource to help people deal with their craving, deal with their withdrawal symptoms, a stay in re, stay drug free for a longer period of time, and get bonded into the recovery.”

“The buprenorphine actually takes away the craving of heroin, it has for me in my life anyway, and um, a few others that I know that’s on the program as well.”

The final stage, recovery, means finding those things that can provide the feelings, inspiration, and relief that the person used to seek through drugs.

“The recovery is, is kind of progressive, I mean even though I may have a year and a half and I go out and I relapse, um, I have acquired some knowledge that does not go away.”

“I didn’t get sober to be miserable. I got sober to live, be free, be useful, and, and to have lots of fun.”

“I want Tony to have a better life. I, I want Tony to go back to his other life, you know, when I was a responsible good person, a good member of society. That’s the person I want. If I choose to, to, to go back down that road to that alcohol, I know exactly where that leads and I don’t want that in my life any more. It, it, it, it’s too much pain.”

“If I gave up my sobriety, my child, it would be my house, it would be my car, it

would be my money, it would be my, um, my relationship, my parents, my business that I want to start. Um, eventually I'd work down to my soul again, maybe my life, the final sacrifice, the one that you don't get another chance."

"A lot of people would look at my life and say that it is very limited as to what I can accomplish and to what I can do and a, they're wrong. It is, you know, my life, I've never felt freer, I've never felt, you know a, a more full of life, than I do right now and my future looks wider open. I, I a, could do anything."