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## Drug Addiction: It Isn't Always An Opioid Or Street Drug

Have you ever seen drug addiction first hand? Some people think it is a choice, others think it's an addiction. But what do you think? Imagine waking up every morning Lord willing just to take a hit, shoot up, or down a mouthful of pills repetitively just to make it through the day. In this paper I will discuss what drug addiction is, what someone has gone through to maybe cause the addiction to start, drugs that are commonly known for addiction, I have personally experienced and been affected by drug addiction within my friends and family.

What is drug addiction? To understand drug addiction, we need to know that addiction is a complex disease, meaning there is more than one factor that plays a role in being an addict. I am sure we have all heard the saying "addiction isn't a disease, it is a choice." Some may say that statement is true, others maybe say that a person was born into this world as an addict or with addiction and that's who they will always be. The term addiction is that no single factor can predict who will or will not become addicted to drugs in their lifetime. Addiction is influenced by a mass of factors that involve one's genes, environment, and the age in which a person first uses drugs, while these all play a role, there are risk factors that increase a person's vulnerability which include; family history of addiction, abuse, neglect or other traumatic experiences such as being raped, molested, or PTSD, depression, anxiety, early use of drugs, and method of administration: smoking or injecting drugs.

Addiction is a developmental disease, which usually begins in adolescence, and even childhood, when the brain is still continuously changing. The pre-frontal cortex which is located just behind the forehead, which governs judgment and decision-making functions and is the last part of the brain to develop. There are common signs and symptoms of drug addiction; a person has built up a drug tolerance where they must use more of the drug to get the same effects that they used with smaller amounts, a person that goes to long without drugs may experience nausea, restlessness, insomnia, depression, sweating, shaking, or anxiety, a person loses control over their drug use-they do drugs or use more than they planned even though they wouldn't, their life revolves around drug use- they spend a lot of time using, figuring out how to get them or recovering from the drugs effects, they abandon activities that they used to enjoy like sports or socializing, a person continues using drugs even though they know it's hurting them which can cause major problems in your life such as blackouts, financial issues, infections, mood swings, paranoid but you continue to use anyway.

What happened in one's life for them to turn to drugs? People take drugs because they want to change something in their lives that they just aren't happy with, so they turn to drugs. People of all types young or older may be prescribed drugs after having a painful procedure or accident/injury, it is natural for a person to feel safe when taking a drug that was prescribed by a doctor. Many people become addicted without even realizing it, since some if not most drugs provide pain relief, decrease in anxiety and other desirable effects. Soon the body will become dependent on drugs just to feel "normal." In cases like these, the loved one may take drugs simply because they cannot tolerate the uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms, and as the tolerance to the drug grows, so does the amount they must take to avoid withdrawal and that itself makes the problem much worse. A person may take drugs because they suffer from depression, anxiety, or some other mental health disorder that may have been undiagnosed or

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misdiagnosed. People do drugs to fit in with others, whether it be family, friends, or coworkers, drugs can cause a false sense of security that increases confidence and feelings of self-worth. A person may be self-medicating and becoming dependent on the substance for an existing disorder that hadn't been addressed. A person might be bored and are seeking some sort of thrill, so they turn to drugs.

Was surgery or something else that flagged the need for drug? There are two kinds of pain; acute pain begins suddenly, lasts for a short time, then goes away as the body heals, a person may feel acute pain after surgery or if they have broken a bone, infected tooth, or kidney stone. Chronic pain lasts for three months or longer, this can be caused by arthritis for an example. People have a hard time describing their pain. If a person has surgery and they are given pain medicine in which they take as needed for pain or a patient who had the same situation only, they took more of their medicine than prescribed, both patients have the risk of becoming addicted to their pain medicine, but everyone has a different tolerance for pain. Everybody is different and the same situation won't apply to every single person.

What kind of drugs is most addictive? While there are plenty of drugs whether they are over the counter, illegal, or prescribed, some individuals may be able to use drugs and not experience the negative effects. Commonly misused classes of prescription drugs involve opioid pain relievers, stimulants, sedatives, and tranquilizers. Opioids are a classification of drugs naturally found in an opium poppy plant. Some of the prescription opioids are made directly from the plant and others are made in labs by scientists. Opioids are mostly used to treat moderate to severe pain, they can also make people feel very relaxed and high. This class of drugs includes but not limited to Heroin, Fentanyl, OxyContin, Codeine, and Morphine just to name a few. Short term effects opioids can cause drowsiness, confusion, nausea, constipation, euphoria (a feeling or state of intense excitement or happiness) and slowed breathing. Slowed breathing could cause hypoxia which is a condition when too little oxygen reaches the brain, this can have short- and long-term effects such as coma, permanent brain damage, and even death. In some area's heroin is cheaper thus easier to gain access that getting prescription opioids, causing some people to switch to using heroin instead.

Stimulants are drugs such as Ritalin, Adderall, and Concerta and amphetamines such as Adderall and Dexedrine are most commonly prescribed for ADHD or narcolepsy (uncontrollable episodes of deep sleep). These drugs increase alertness, attention, and energy. They also enhance the effects of Dopamine (affects feelings of pleasure) and Norepinephrine which affects the blood vessels, blood pressure and heart rate, blood sugar and breathing. While taking a stimulant people have reported feeling a "rush", also having increased blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, blood sugar, and a decrease in blood flow. Stimulants that are taken in high doses can lead to several issues such as heart failure and seizures. Repeated misuse of stimulants even in a short period could cause psychosis, anger, and paranoia.

Central nervous system depressants are drugs that include sedatives, tranquilizers, and hypnotics. These are usually prescribed to treat anxiety, panic, acute stress reactions, and sleep disorders. Sedatives include sleep drugs like Ambien and Lunesta. Tranquilizers like Valium and Xanax but can also include muscle relaxants and other anti-anxiety s. These medications slow brain activity, that can cause drowsiness, slurred speech, poor concentration, confusion, dizziness, problems with movement and memory, lowered blood pressure and slowed breathing. National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Most Commonly Used Addictive Drugs." NIDA, ([www.drugabuse.gov/publications/media-guide/most-commonly-used-addictive-drugs](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/media-guide/most-commonly-used-addictive-drugs).)

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Synthetic Cannabinoids or commonly known as Spice/ K2, are human-made, mind-altering medications that were either sprayed on dried, shredded plant material so it can be smoked or sold as liquids to be vaporized and inhaled with e-cigarettes or other devices to produce a "high". Synthetic cannabinoids are part of the group called new psychoactive substances or NPS. These are nonregulated mind-altering medications that have become available on the market and intended to have the same effects as illegal medications.

Individuals who took to the ER after using synthetic medications experienced rapid heart rate, violent behavior, vomiting, and suicidal thoughts. Medications like this also raise blood pressure, reduce blood supply to the heart, cause kidney damage, and/ or seizures.

How I have seen drug addiction first hand. I have personally been affected by drug addiction with a few of my family members. My step sister Denise died in 1998 due to drugs, her husband gave her a dirty drug needle with some sort of drug in it, the next day she was being admitted into Holston Valley Medical Center. Over the next few days, she was in a vegetative state and was declared brain dead. We buried her a couple of days after, she leaves behind a son who is now 25. My uncle suffered from drug addiction, his drug of choice was Ambien, yes, the drug that helps a person fall asleep, he became addicted to it. He was a Navy Veteran who was in the Persian Gulf War, he has seen things I am sure we here in America don't see daily. He would have night terrors and was diagnosed with PTSD from being in a warzone, so his doctor prescribed him Ambien, at first it worked but after he had been taking it a while, he would start to take more pills than prescribed and sometimes with alcohol which intensified the effects Ambien has on a person. He would drive once he had his "fix" and sometimes would doze off while driving. Unfortunately, he passed away on January 23, 2015, from a heart attack. My cousin Tasha, she was addicted to Heroin, she lived in Ohio and I hadn't seen her since we were kids. She was found unresponsive with needle marks all over herself, she was dumped at a local ER in Ohio, even though they did try to save her life, she didn't pull through. She had received too much brain damage and was declared brain dead. She became an organ donor and a couple of lives were blessed that day, she leaves behind three children.

**Conclusion.** Is addiction a disease? Or is it legitimately a situation where the addict has a choice? With all of the medications in the world, and especially the ones that people are hugely addicted too, it is a choice, on their behalf they made the choice to "fix" whatever was wrong in their life or to get that "high", but it will cause a person to lose everything they have ever had including their kids. If a pregnant woman has done drugs while she was pregnant, she should be held accountable for child abuse and neglect, because once a woman gets pregnant her body is no longer her body, it has become a home for the next nine months to a human and she should be charged to the highest punishment. No one held a gun to an addict's head and forced drugs into their systems, so yes drug addiction is a choice and it's a choice the person makes themselves, I have always heard "one can't help someone that doesn't want to be helped", the same statement applies here, if an addict wants to get clean, then they will but they have to want it bad enough.