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## ADDICTION AND THE BRAIN



You can become addicted to almost anything. This is because the brain and the subjective feeling of pleasure play a large role in the addiction process.

### Reward Center

It is the part of the brain that is responsible for feeling pleasure, finding ways to get it, and meeting your needs. When we are thirsty, it is the reward center that drives us to quench our thirst. The same is true of hunger or sexual need.

The reward center has some control. When the „reward”, such as a dose of alcohol, becomes an obsession and compulsion, we stop controlling the "hunger". This means that the center has become damaged and addiction becomes a serious problem.

This happens when dopamine begins to be released in such enormous amounts that the brain cannot control it. It is assumed that a delicious dinner increases the secretion of this compound by 50%, a cigarette by 200%, and amphetamines by as much as 1000%! The brain gets used to such excess amounts, thereby increasing the tolerance to certain substances. In order to achieve the intended pleasure, we have to take more and more addictive substances.

As we become addicted, the number of receptors also changes, which in consequence leads to us no longer being able to enjoy everyday occurrences. Only taking a given substance in increasing amounts gives satisfaction. When we are not able to take it, withdrawal syndrome occurs. In addition to somatic symptoms, the stress hormone is then produced, and this affects the addict's behavior.

### The causes of addiction

There are various factors that contribute to addiction. They can be divided into three categories:

1. Biological factors: genes; physiological factors such as liver enzyme differences that may predispose us to alcoholism; and gender: statistically, men are more prone to addiction than women.
2. Psychological factors: such as personality traits, e.g. impulsivity; previous abuse and trauma; mental health factors such as anxiety, attention deficit disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, or depression.
3. Environmental factors: family relationships, e.g. other addicts in the family or marital problems may increase the risk of addiction; availability of the substance; peer pressure, especially among teenagers; unemployment.

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According to *Global statistics on addictive behaviours: 2014 status report*, about **240 million** people worldwide suffer from alcohol dependence (about 4.9% of the adult population), about **1 billion** are addicted to tobacco products, and about **15 million** people suffer from drug addiction

## ***How to recognize addiction?***

Recognizing your addiction and its causes is the key to getting help. The sooner we seek support for ourselves or others, the greater the chances of recovery. Here are some signs and symptoms to look for when diagnosing addiction:

Physical symptoms:

- Changes in eating or sleeping habits, sleep quality;
- Physical damage caused by the substance;
- Changes in external appearance;
- Increased substance tolerance – taking more substances to „improve” our functioning.

Psychological symptoms:

- Searching for substances or engaging in an activity daily, especially to deal with stress;
- Using a substance or engaging in an activity despite the fact that it causes problems (such as health or financial problems);
- Involvement in risky behavior;
- Aggression when not under the influence of a given substance, seeking it „at any cost”.

Social symptoms:

- Loss of interest in hobbies or activities that were previously enjoyable;
- Poor performance at work or school, evading responsibilities;
- Withdrawal from social life and secrecy;
- Denying that there is a problem with addiction;
- Financial problems due to spending money on addiction;
- Legal issues related to addiction.

## **How to prevent addiction?**

There are several ways to fight addiction. It's a good idea to implement them gradually.

1. Manage stress in a healthy way – addiction only brings relief for a while. It is worth finding ways that bring long-term effects, such as sports, yoga, meditation, and social involvement.
2. Seeking professional help – when you feel that you are unable to cope with stress or difficult emotions yourself.
3. Finding work-life balance – take time for rest and hobbies.
4. Focus on something valuable – it can be a relationship, family, but also a hobby or pursuing success.
5. Treating substance abuse in the family as a warning, not something to emulate.

Regardless of its type, each addiction causes some kind of harm. It is therefore very important to quickly spot disturbing symptoms and take appropriate steps towards treatment, before the worst possible consequences occur.

***Don't wait, call now! If you don't know how to deal with addiction concerning yourself or someone you love, please contact us. We are here to support you!***