

Methamphetamine

Florida Office of Drug Control

Drug Addiction and Treatment

What is Drug Addiction?

Drug addiction is a complex but treatable brain disease. It is characterized by compulsive drug craving, seeking, and use that persists even in the face of severe adverse consequences. For many people, drug addiction becomes chronic, with relapses possible even after long periods of abstinence. In fact, relapse to drug abuse occurs at rates similar to those for other well-characterized, chronic medical illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. As a chronic, recurring illness, addiction may require repeated treatments to increase the intervals between relapses and diminish their intensity, until abstinence is achieved. Through treatment tailored to individual needs, people with drug addiction can recover and lead productive lives.

The ultimate goal of drug addiction treatment is to enable an individual to achieve lasting abstinence; more immediate goals are to reduce drug abuse, improve the patient's ability to function, and minimize the medical and social complications of drug abuse and addiction. Like people with diabetes or heart disease, people in treatment for drug addiction need to change their behavior and adopt a healthier lifestyle.

Untreated addiction exacts significant human and other costs on families and communities, including violence and property crimes, prison expenses, court costs, emergency room visits, healthcare utilization, child abuse and neglect, lost child support, foster care and welfare costs, reduced productivity, and unemployment.

Illicit drug abuse costs our society \$181 billion (2002). This amount includes healthcare, criminal justice, and lost productivity. Successful drug abuse treatment can help reduce costs as well as the spread of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and other infectious diseases. According to some estimates, every dollar spent on addiction treatment programs causes a \$4 to \$7 reduction in the cost of drug-related crimes. With some outpatient programs, total savings can exceed costs by a ratio of 12:1.



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www.stopmethinflorida.org

Effective Treatment for Drug Addiction:

Scientific research since the mid-1970s shows that treatment can help many people change destructive behaviors, avoid relapse, and successfully remove themselves from a life of substance abuse and addiction. Recovery from drug addiction is a long-term process and frequently requires multiple episodes of treatment. Based on this research, key principles have been identified that should form the basis of any effective treatment program:

- No single treatment is appropriate for all individuals.
- Treatment needs to be readily available.
- Effective treatment attends to multiple needs of the individual, not just his or her drug addiction.
- An individual's treatment and services plan must be assessed often and modified to meet the person's changing needs.
- Remaining in treatment for an adequate period of time is critical for treatment effectiveness.
- Counseling and other behavioral therapies are critical components of virtually all effective treatments for addiction.
- Medications are an important element for treatment, especially when combined with counseling and other behavioral therapies.
- Addicted or drug-abusing individuals with coexisting mental disorders should have both disorders treated in an integrated way.
- Medical management of withdrawal syndrome is only the first stage of addiction treatment and by itself does little to change long-term drug use.
- Treatment does not need to be voluntary to be effective.
- Possible drug use during treatment must be monitored continuously.
- Treatment programs should provide assessment for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases, and should provide counseling to help patients modify or change behaviors that place themselves or others at risk of infection.
- As is the case with other chronic, relapsing diseases, recovery from drug addiction can be a long-term process and typically requires multiple episodes of treatment, including "booster" sessions and other forms of continuing care.