

# What is Addiction?

**Addiction:** a disease involving continued use of a substance despite serious substance-related problems, such as loss of control over use, health problems, or negative social consequences.

## Signs of Addiction

### Loss of Control Over Substance Use

- Using more of the substance than intended
- Difficulty reducing substance use
- Significant time spent obtaining, using, or recovering from substance
- Having **cravings**: strong desire to use substance

### Social / Occupational Problems

- Not fulfilling major obligations at work, school, or home
- Social problems caused by continued use of substance
- Decreasing or giving up important social or occupational activities

### Risky Use

- Using the substance in situations where it is physically dangerous
- Physical or psychological problems caused by continued use of the substance

### Physical Effects

- Building **tolerance**: needing more of the substance to achieve desired effect
- Experiencing **withdrawal**: physical or psychological symptoms when not using the substance

## Addiction Facts

- Addiction is a **disease**. Addiction causes changes in the brain's structure and functioning. It is not caused by poor willpower or character flaws.
- Addiction can grow slowly and isn't always easy to see. Many people with addiction continue to function in some parts of their life, but have problems in other areas.
- Relapse means returning to regular substance use after a period of sobriety. A lapse, on the other hand, is an isolated incident of use without returning to old patterns of substance use.
- Relapses can happen at any point during recovery, which is a lifelong process. Those who are in recovery are at heightened risk during periods of stress.

## Addiction Treatment

### Individual Therapy

A therapist helps change substance-related thoughts and behaviors and increase motivation for change.

### Group Therapy

Led by a therapist, members encourage and support one another in making meaningful life changes.

### Support Groups

Meet with peers who are also in recovery and participate in a social environment free of substances.

### Medication

Used in specific cases for symptom management, medication is most effective when paired with therapy.