

ask



Dr Roshan Jain

Your *mental and emotional health* questions answered

Q I have been unable to seek help for my drinking habit despite understanding that it's beginning to affect my health and relationships. I feel guilty about it. Everyone I know blames me for my situation. Is addiction my fault? Kindly advise.

There is no simple answer to your question. Historically, addicts were thought to be morally flawed and lacking in willpower. Those views shaped society's responses to addiction, treating it more as a moral failing. Thus the emphasis was on punitive rather than preventative and therapeutic approaches. Scientific advances and discoveries about the functioning of the brain are now altering these views. Research has argued that addiction is a brain disease that also affects one's behaviour. While the path to addiction begins with the act of taking alcohol, over time, a person's ability to not choose it is compromised, and seeking and consuming it becomes compulsive. This behaviour is largely the effect of prolonged exposure of alcohol on the brain. What was initially sought as an aid to experience pleasure and enjoyment turns to something that is needed for you to feel normal. Addiction affects multiple brain circuits. Simple genetic basis cannot explain the inheritance of addiction, as vulnerability is multi-factorial with interplay of genetic makeup, age of exposure, environmental influences (including stress from work, relationships and social milieu), and psychological status. Associated medical and psychiatric illnesses are common and there is an argument on whether they are the cause or effect of a specific addiction. **You can blame yourself only if you**

fail to seek help. The realization that there is a problem is the first step to recovery. I think it's important you seek the needed professional support, and enjoy good health and the quality of life you deserve.

Q My 22-year-old son was recently diagnosed as schizophrenic. He denies suffering from any problems and has declined medicine. He occasionally gets irrational and angry. We have given him the medicine without his knowledge, by mixing it in his food. Is it right to continue this. Kindly advise.

This is a complex matter often brought up in clinical settings. There is a fundamental ethical and legal obligation in medicine to respect autonomous decision-making. The covert administration of medication to an autonomous individual against his/her will is, unacceptable both legally and ethically. Doubts may exist in a situation relating to non-autonomous individuals who are incapable (due

to severe enduring brain condition like dementia or mental retardation) of giving informed consent. Legally, treatment without permission is allowed only where there is absolute necessity to save life or prevent worsening of a condition, or where self or others are at risk of harm. Even in these cases, covert treatment is not allowed. In the eyes of law every individual is presumed to retain the capacity to make decisions unless proven otherwise. **It's not right to presume that people with mental illness necessarily lose their ability to make or take decisions.** In mental illnesses like schizophrenia, during the active phase of illness or in later years, the person may develop intellectual difficulties and require assistance in decision making. In those cases, every effort should be made to engage the individual and the family in decisions pertaining to treatment, and keep them assured of only the minimal required dose. I think your son should see a clinician regularly, so that he can be guided into a necessary treatment regime.



Our doctors will answer all queries on emotional and mental health. Got mind trouble of your own? Drop us a mail at bpositiveQA@apollolife.com Or write to

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