

# Be High On Life, Not Drugs!

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**W**e live in the world of excesses, where it is becoming impossible to know how much is too much. This applies to everything we do – food we eat, money we seek, or relationship we crave for. We hate restrictions and regulations, and are driven either consciously or subconsciously to override them.

Indulging in recreational drugs is on the rise. For some, it is lifestyle and for others, a quick fix coping strategy to ease off stress, anxiety, or depression. Other reasons why people take drugs include:

- ◆ Curiosity
- ◆ Peer pressure, joining in to have a good time
- ◆ Improve performance in exams or sports
- ◆ Many just take drugs without giving a thought to its potential harm

**Experimenting doesn't automatically lead to abuse, and there is no specific level at which drug use moves from casual to problematic.**

It varies by individual. Drug abuse is less about the amount consumed or the frequency, and more to do with the consequences of the use. Along with social and occupational problems, addicts also suffer from a sense of shame, helplessness and isolation.

Addiction is a complex problem, perhaps a disorder or a disease that affects the structure and function of the brain and individual's behaviour.



Drug addiction destroys lives, tears apart families and harms society. Drug addiction is not a choice of lifestyle, it is a disorder of the brain and we need to recognise this.

The path to addiction begins with the act of taking drugs, but over time a person's ability to choose not to do so is compromised, and consuming the drug becomes compulsive. This behaviour results largely from the effects of prolonged exposure of the drug on

brain functioning. Whilst pleasure and enjoyment may have been originally sought with the drug, but with habitual use it will be needed to feel normal. Many individuals indulge to reduce unpleasant feelings or emotions.

Addiction affects multiple brain circuits, including those involved in reward and motivation, learning and memory, and inhibitory control over behaviour.

Drug abuse being an urban phenomenon is a myth. Alcohol, cannabis and opiates are the major substances of abuse largely seen in north-eastern and western region of the country. Alcoholism is high in many southern states. According to reports, there are about 6.25 crore alcoholics, 90 lakh cannabis users, 2.5 lakh opiate users and nearly 10 lakh illicit drug users in the country. As per the National Survey on Extent, Pattern and Trends of Drug Abuse in India conducted by the Centre and United Nations, the current prevalence rates within the age group of 12-18 years was alcohol (21.4 per cent), cannabis (3 per cent), opiates (0.7 per cent) and any illicit drug (3.6 per cent).

## Who are vulnerable?

Vulnerability depends on many factors including:

- ◆ Family history of addiction
- ◆ Age of exposure to drugs
- ◆ Environmental influences such as traumatic experiences in childhood due to abuse and neglect, stress related to work and relationship problems, and psychiatric illness including anxiety, depression

## Typical Manifestations

- ◆ **Behavioural changes** – Being impulsive when high, including sharing needles, having unprotected sex, and driving
- ◆ **Interpersonal problems** – Fights with partner, relatives, boss and losing friends
- ◆ **Conduct and legal trouble** –

Disorderly behaviour and stealing to support drug habit

- ◆ **Neglecting self-care** – Appearing unkempt and dirty, with poor hygiene
- ◆ **Neglecting responsibilities** – At home, work or school

Features may vary depending on the nature of the drug. For example, those taking Marijuana present with loud talking, inappropriate giggling and loss of motivation. Those taking Cocaine or Amphetamine demonstrate hyperactivity, disjointed speech, euphoria and poor sleep.

## Common Features

- ◆ Less tolerance - needing more of the drug to get same effect as on lower dose, or to sustain a high
- ◆ Withdrawal symptoms - taking drugs to avoid or relieve withdrawal effects such as nausea, sweating, shaking, depression and anxiety
- ◆ Loss of control – inability to control the intake of drugs once commenced or taking larger amounts or for longer periods
- ◆ Persistent desire or craving - to take the drug or unsuccessful efforts to cut down
- ◆ Preoccupation with the drug – more time spent thinking about obtaining, consuming or recovering from effects
- ◆ Prioritising drugs - social, occupational and recreational pursuits given up or reduced because of drug use
- ◆ Continued use - despite knowledge of the harmful effects - physical, psychological, social and legal

## Effective Treatment

Addiction is a treatable disease. Do not feel isolated or ostracised, as effective intervention and help are available. All that is required is a 'willing participant'.

- ◆ No single treatment is appropriate for everyone.
- ◆ Combination of medication and behavioural therapies are needed for an overall therapeutic process.
- ◆ Suppressing withdrawal symptoms with medication can be important first step of treatment - called Detoxification.
- ◆ Relapse prevention with motivational counselling and behavioural therapy for maintaining abstinence.
- ◆ Return to medicinal detox in event of relapse.
- ◆ Treatment plan must be patient-centred and modified to meet the changing needs.
- ◆ Treat any underlying mental disorder.
- ◆ Treat physical ailments like HIV or AIDS, Hepatitis B and C, especially when one uses injected drugs and shared needles.
- ◆ Monitor any illicit drug use during treatment.
- ◆ Attendance at support organisations may be very helpful to find people at different stages of recovery.
- ◆ In severe problems, residential treatment programs may be necessary.
- ◆ Most patients will require ongoing advice, support and structured care and motivational therapy to achieve desired goal - of harm minimisation, sustained abstinence, change in patterns of behaviour and balanced lifestyle.

It is important to recognise that motivation is dynamic and subject to fluctuation.

Therefore, drug relapses should not be seen as a failure of the individual or treatment, but rather as an opportunity to further understand the issues of addiction.