

# Overcoming the Plague of ADDICTION

Understanding addiction is a key step in overcoming it. But we must also rely on the Lord and believe that He can heal us.

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When someone struggles with an addiction, it's important to know that there is hope. There are people every single day all around the world who are able to find freedom from the substance or behavior holding them hostage. It will take a concerted personal effort, an understanding of the factors that are unique to them that are holding them in the addictive cycle, along with a belief that God can inspire them in their personal path to freedom.

In my 38 years of helping people overcome addictions, I have seen our understanding and treatment of addiction improve over the years. I strongly suspect that this evolution will continue for years to come. While those in the field of addiction sciences face challenging questions, we continue to make positive strides. So the information being presented here is based on what we know today, with the belief that additional light and knowledge will continue to come forth in the future.

## Understanding Addiction

I know what a heart-wrenching struggle it is to wrestle with an addiction, but the first step is understanding addiction yourself. Here are several key ideas to shed some light on the subject:

- Addictions begin with initial exposure and end with dependency. Wherever someone is on this continuum, they can still exercise some degree of agency and find their way out of the addictive behavior.

- Labeling someone as an addict can undermine their long-term progress. This is especially true in the early stages of the behavior. The label “in recovery” appears to be more helpful. It’s like saying, “I am choosing to rely on the Savior and His Atonement in order to become more like Him” rather than, “I am stuck in sin forever.”
- All addictions have several components to them: *biological* (genetics, brain chemistry, etc.), *psychological* (self-worth, personality characteristics, post-traumatic stress, etc.), *social* (parents, friends, culture, etc.), and *spiritual* (personal and family religious practices, etc.). The combination of each of these components, and their relative strengths, are often as unique as the individual. Each component may require specific, individualized attention for the person as a whole to free him or herself from the negative behavior.



Biological



Psychological



Social



Spiritual

## Signs on the Path to Addiction

The following are indicators that an individual may be on the path to developing a habit, then a compulsion, then an addiction:



**Obsessiveness:** They become less interested in healthy activities as the harmful substance or behavior gradually dominates.



**Increased craving:** They progressively want more.



**Secrecy:** They are increasingly reluctant to allow others to know of their decisions and behaviors.



**Denial:** They lie to themselves about their growing dependency and believe their own lies.



**Withdrawal:** When they are denied access to the harmful substance or behavior, their sense of well-being fades.



**Reverting back:** In spite of their realization of the negative impact on their life, they return back to the substance or behavior.

Additionally, the individual is typically the worst person to accurately assess where he or she is on the addiction continuum once the habit starts. If you are wondering if a loved one is on the path to addiction, there are many resources available to help, in your community as well as online.



## Finding Treatment

- The responsibility for change falls to each individual. While family and friends can be supportive, they cannot interfere with someone else's agency. If the individual has no desire to change, no form of treatment will be successful.
- The path to recovery can be different for each individual. Due to the relative strengths and weaknesses of the four unique factors mentioned previously (biological, psychological, social, and spiritual), there is no single treatment approach that works for everyone. Personal study, consultation with experts, and a commitment to persevere until the solution is found will ultimately lead to success.
- While unresolved addiction can leave the individual's life in ruins, all of their loved ones are also negatively impacted. These loving, supportive people also need support and care.

While it is within God's power to remove this challenge from affected individuals if they allow Him to, He in His infinite wisdom has things for those individuals to learn as they work with Him toward a solution. Virtually everyone who has broken free from their addiction can testify of the learning that came through their personal victory over their vice. ■

## FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

Addiction should not be viewed only as a moral weakness but as a multifaceted challenge that virtually anyone could face. If you know someone struggling with an addiction, there are any number of things you should consider doing and some you should consider not doing. While the following suggestions are not an exhaustive list and will vary depending on the specific situation, you could prayerfully consider each:

- A little prevention is worth a lot of cure. Forewarned is forearmed! Regardless of the receptiveness of your loved one, speak up. People often ask me what they should say or how they should say it. My response is always, "Anything is preferable to nothing!" Silence is one of worst things you can employ. Pray for courage and insight; then open your mouth and speak up, even if they don't want to listen.
- A good family member or friend encourages and helps those they love to make good choices. They also discourage and do not enable bad choices.
- This scripture gives needed direction to those whose loved one is headed down the path of addiction:

"Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:43).

- Be a good cheerleader. Cheerleaders do not take a win or a loss personally. They understand that their role is to cheer, to encourage, and to be positive. While they do have an emotional investment in the competition, wanting their participant to win, they don't take offense when things aren't going well.
- "Study[ing] it out in your mind" (Doctrine and Covenants 9:8) is an important part of helping yourself and the person you're concerned about. Learn about addiction so you can have a better idea of what it is, how it can be treated, and what you can do to help.



## ONLINE RESOURCES

The Church provides the following websites to help you learn about addiction:

- [addictionrecovery.lds.org](http://addictionrecovery.lds.org)
- [overcomingpornography.org](http://overcomingpornography.org)

Your country may also have national organizations and websites about overcoming addiction, such as [ncadd.org](http://ncadd.org) (addressing drug and alcohol addiction) and [fightthenewdrug.org](http://fightthenewdrug.org) (addressing pornography) in the United States.

Church leaders can refer to [counselingresources.lds.org](http://counselingresources.lds.org) for guidance in helping those in recovery and their families.