



NOT EVEN ONCE

BY SHANNA BUTLER

***"Stay away from illegal drugs.
They can absolutely destroy you.
They will take away your powers of reason."
—President Gordon B. Hinckley***

It's shaped like a walnut but weighs about three pounds. And it controls everything your body does from breathing to calculus. It's your brain.

Your brain is as high-tech as it gets. The various parts of your brain work in a miraculous combination to run your entire body. But drug abuse can seriously alter how your brain and body work. Harmful narcotics change the way you think and feel by posing as unhealthy substitutes for chemicals that help your brain run normally. These mind-altering drugs can cause addictions that are not easily overcome. And even one-time use can be harmful.

Just Once Does Hurt

Glen Hanson, director of the Utah Addiction Center and a senior adviser for the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the National Institutes of Health, says one-time drug abuse can be harmful, and in the few cases where people are sensitive to the drug, it can be lethal. Continued recreational use of drugs causes brain damage and increasingly compromises your ability to make decisions, he says.

Habit-forming drugs not only affect your body, but as you surrender your body and will to them, they will also destroy the other command center of your body—your spirit. Choosing to disobey the Word of

Wisdom will lead you away from the Lord.

Trying drugs “just once” can physically harm you in some cases. But “just once” will *always* harm you spiritually. President George Albert Smith (1870–1951), eighth president of the Church, said: “If you cross to the devil’s side of the line one inch, you are in the tempter’s power, and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly, because you will have lost the spirit of the Lord.”¹

Elder Boyd K. Packer put it this way: “Narcotic addiction serves the design of the prince of darkness, for it disrupts the channel to the holy spirit of truth. . . . Addiction has the capacity to disconnect the human will and nullify moral agency. It can rob one of the power to decide. Agency is too fundamental a doctrine to be left in such jeopardy.”²

Drugs Can Destroy You

Although harmful drugs are not mentioned by name in Doctrine and Covenants 89, modern-day prophets have warned against them repeatedly. President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “Stay away from illegal drugs. They can absolutely destroy you. They will take away your powers of reason. They will enslave you in a vicious and terrible way. They will destroy your mind and your body. They will build within you such cravings that you will do anything to satisfy them.”³ The same goes for abusing prescription drugs or any other addictive substance, including alcohol and tobacco.

There is hope, however. Those who are addicted can find help, and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ they can also find healing and comfort.⁴



“Keep the Word of Wisdom. Seek worthy companions. Attend church faithfully. Never fail daily to seek for help through prayer. And I promise you that the way will be easier and you shall have a composure of mind and a confident attitude toward life and the future. . . . [H]ave faith. The Lord will be with you; you will be guided. I bear witness of Him and of His sacrifice and of His Atonement and of His love for you.”

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Word of Wisdom: The Principle and the Promises,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 19.

Shane’s Story

Shane (name has been changed) knows what it’s like to be a slave to drugs. He was experiencing major amounts of stress and depression in his life and wanted relief. He smoked his first marijuana joint when he was 16, only a week after he took his first drink of alcohol with some friends on New Year’s Eve.

“We thought it would be fun. And we wanted to be cool with each other and feel important and stuff,” he says. “I really didn’t know what I wanted. I should have stuck to my standards.”

His first experience with marijuana led him to other drugs like prescription pain killers and cocaine. In less than a year, Shane went from being an active Church member and a good student and worker to being a heroin addict, alienated from the Church and failing in school and at work. “In the end I was doing heroin seven or eight times a day. It went pretty fast.”

“I had a job, but I was stealing money, robbing houses, trying to rip off kids. I started selling drugs to make more money.” His health started to go downhill, too. “I got skinny, and I just really didn’t care about myself. I damaged my heart and lungs and other organs.”

His life was falling apart physically and spiritually. His family was suffering as well.

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“Watching Shane suffer emotionally, physically, and spiritually was very painful,” says his mother. “When one person struggles,



HOW TO HELP YOURSELF OR A LOVED ONE

Shane and his mother say they feel that not many people understood what their family went through. Many people ignored them and only a few talked directly about their struggles. Shane's mother says, "The most wonderful thing anyone can do is to be open and honest. Ask how they are doing. Honest concern will help."

LDS Family Services can help you or a loved one recover from addictions. Counselors are available in many places in the United States and Canada. LDS Family Services also sponsors recovery support groups in some areas. No referrals are necessary.

The Social and Emotional Strength link at ProvidentLiving.org can lead you to more resources, including *A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing*, a new booklet that is also available from distribution centers or at www.ldscatalog.com (item #36764). The booklet is both a workbook and a guide to go along with the addiction recovery support groups run by LDS Family Services.

Preach My Gospel, pages 187–190, has some excellent advice on how to support those struggling with addictions and how to overcome them yourself.

Talk to your parents, bishop, doctor, or other trusted adults if you need help. They can point you to the resources you need.

Go to www.drugfree.org for more information on the signs of addiction.



the entire family is affected. It can also have devastating repercussions, even outside the immediate family. It was a very sad thing for all who knew Shane to experience."

He was caught abusing prescription drugs and attended a treatment program. "I came back, and I got right back into it," he says. He was suspended from school for a year and court-ordered to another treatment program. For Shane, getting caught and forced into treatment saved him.

His family stood with him through the treatment program, and they continue to support him as he struggles to get his life back. As they do this, they rely on the gospel and on the Savior's Atonement.

"Without our Savior and His Atoning sacrifice, what hope would there be for somebody like Shane who has completely stripped themselves of all the survival keys the gospel gives?" Shane's mother says.

"It's hard to repent," says Shane. "You go through a lot."

Confessing to his priesthood leaders and others he had wronged was difficult. But Shane learned a new level of honesty as he worked through the process that will serve as a foundation for recovery throughout his life. He feels good about where he is now and is hopeful about the future.

For others, Shane has a warning: "Those kids that try to get you into drugs don't really care about you. They just care about the drugs. You have to realize where drugs are going to lead you. Just never get yourself in that situation."

**"Obedience brings peace in decision making."
—President James E. Faust**

Addiction can start with the first pill, smoke, or sip. The only way to protect your mind, body, and spirit is to stay away from dangerous substances.

Don't forget there are people and places to turn to if you need help to beat an addiction. Talk to your parents and bishop. Professional counseling is also available through LDS Family Services.

“It definitely has changed my life,” Shane says. “I will always struggle with it.” But he is quick to point out that recovery and healing is possible for anybody caught up in drugs and that it’s never too late to stop.

Stick to Standards

Many young people try drugs to fill voids in their lives, but this decision always leads to broken hearts and bodies. Whether they feel a need for friends, or peace, or happiness, or love, these teens, like Shane, always find drugs to be an unfulfilling substitute for what they really need. Turning to the Lord and to our families, instead of to other sources, will truly fill our needs. Abusing drugs can never do that.

Brother Douglas LeCheminant, a licensed clinical social worker and program specialist at LDS Family Services, says, “Continue to nurture your connections with trusted peers and trusted adults. That is critical. Develop the self-awareness to recognize the connection between being tempted and feeling a need for acceptance. When you feel that need, it is important to fill it in healthy, gospel-centered ways. Stay close to your family and the Church.”

Use Your Brain

President James E. Faust says, “Obedience brings peace in decision making. If we have firmly made up our minds to follow the commandments, we will not have to redecide which path to take when temptation comes our way. That is how obedience brings spiritual safety.”⁵

Obedience to the prophets and the Word of Wisdom will bring you spiritual as well as physical safety. Your miraculous brain

EXTRA! EXTRA!

Find more information on keeping the Word of Wisdom and dealing with addiction in the Gospel Library at www.lds.org. “When a Loved One Struggles with Addiction,” by Corrie Lynne Player (*Ensign*, Jan. 2005); “The Enemy Within,” by President James E. Faust (*Ensign*, Nov. 2000); “Shake Off the Chains with Which Ye Are Bound,” by Elder Marvin J. Ashton (*Ensign*, Nov. 1986); “Ye Are the Temple of God,” by President Boyd K. Packer (*Ensign*, Nov. 2000).

The following non-Church resources may also be of some help: www.InterveneNow.org; National Drug Information, Treatment and Referral line, at 1-800-662-HELP.

and spirit should be telling you one important thing right now: The only safe road to a healthy mind, body, and spirit, is through obedience to the commandments. **NE**

NOTES

1. In *Sharing the Gospel with Others*, sel. Preston Nibley (1948), 43.
2. “Revelation in a Changing World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 14.
3. “Living Worthy of the Girl You Will Someday Marry,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 49.
4. *A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing* (2005), vi.
5. “Obedience: The Path to Freedom,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 47.

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