

INSPIRED

To Make Healthy Choices

Newer studies are continually defining how our brain functions and communicates.

The latest studies have found that there are 2 systems in the brain, the reward and the anti-reward system. The brain uses many pathways to communicate and **continually works to stay in balance and avoid pain.**

There are 9 main brain chemistry neurotransmitters (molecules of different sizes and shapes) which pass the messages along the pathways. Each controls different aspects of our everyday life such as our anxiety, fear, anger, motivation, fight and flight, sleep, calm, pain relief, stress reduction, memory, new learning, perception, movement, loving oneself and others.

These new findings also clarified how addiction (alcohol, nicotine, drugs, gambling and others) hijacks these pathways. The drugs mimic the neurotransmitters, taking over the pathway, so that the body stops to manufacture them and only the drugs will bring the desired response, be it feeling calm, or not feeling pain.

The brain always tries to stay in balance and avoid pain.

As the addicts become more dependent on the drug, their tolerance increases, which means they need more of the drug to bring the same response. As they continue to add the amount of drug or more drugs, more pathways shut down their own production of the transmitters and the addicts start to lose the ability to love one-self or others, memory is impacted, new learning no longer takes place, they lose motivation, they receive less and less pain relief and pleasure, they can no longer relax or stay calm – losing all these regulatory systems.

Eventually there comes a point when an addict isn't using to feel the high anymore, but is using drugs to avoid the low.

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This is why addiction is a brain disease. **There are changes and alterations within the brain as it becomes addicted to the external drugs, while the internal system becomes depleted.**

Certain things such as our family history, time we had our first sip of alcohol or used drugs, allow us to see what type of risk we have to become addicted. This short Addiction Risk Profile Questionnaire {ARPQ} (developed by Dr. Merrill Norton at the University of Georgia) will allow you to find out if you are at a Low, Medium or High risk for addiction.

1. Age of First Drink (first sip) _____
2. Age of First Drug _____ (for anything, opioid, Rx)
3. Family History of Addiction _____ (Yes, No)
4. Family History of Mental Illness _____ (Yes, No – 2 generations back)
5. Family History of Trauma _____
6. Family History of Suicide _____
7. Are you compulsive/impulsive? _____
8. Are you perfectionistic? _____
9. Do you have healthy communications with your family members? _____
10. Are you a religious person or been involved in spiritual programming in your life? _____

Scoring: Q 1&2: Score 1 if 12 years & below; Qs 3-10: Score 1 for every Yes. **Add your scores.**

Scores of 0 to 4=Low Risk; 5 to 6=Moderate Risk; 7+=High Risk. Having Yes for 3 of 4 family history questions, also constitutes High Risk of addiction.

Knowing your ARPQ, and how drugs hijack and alter the brain, will hopefully prevent the usage of drugs and reduce addiction.



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BRAIN AND ADDICTION
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Drugs hijack the reward brain system and slowly shut it down.

Changes and alterations occur within the brain as it becomes addicted to external drugs.

Addiction is a brain disease.