



# life Happens

## HEADLINES

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## Addiction: A Disease of Isolation

The ongoing pandemic has many Americans feeling lonelier than ever. This disconnection fuels a different disease that thrives in seclusion; addiction. Referred to as a disease of isolation, overcoming addiction is a challenge that has become increasingly difficult throughout the pandemic. As the Delta variant threatens to derail reopening plans and social distancing measures are ramping up again, stress increases with fewer ways to manage it. Resilience-promoting activities like working out at a gym or socializing with friends at a restaurant aren't always accessible and can pose health risks. As a result, many people are turning to substance use to cope. In June 2020, the CDC reported that 13% of Americans started or increased substance use to cope with stress and emotions from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic also creates circumstances that make addiction deadlier. Isolation makes it easier to hide signs of addiction from those who would otherwise intervene. It limits access to critical prevention and intervention resources. Death from overdose is more likely when people use alone because there is no one to administer Naloxone or call for help. Understanding how substance use can snowball into addiction creates more awareness of the risks. This recognition allows individuals to make better-informed decisions that can protect against addiction and guide them towards support and recovery.

### Addiction's Powerful Hold

Hard-wired for survival, your brain encourages activities essential to life like eating, exercising, and sex by releasing dopamine, the pleasure hormone, in your brain's reward center. Dopamine interacts with neurotransmitters responsible for memory and motivation, teaching your brain to seek out and repeat these behaviors. Drugs trigger the same part of the brain- the reward center- then hijack it. Marijuana, cocaine, other substances are like a shortcut to the reward center. They flood your brain with dopamine, and these surges teach your brain to seek drugs at the expense of other healthier activities.



When you become addicted, the substance becomes as crucial as other survival behaviors like eating or drinking. With repeated use, drugs alter and change your brain's structure- particularly in areas critical to judgment, decision making, learning and memory, and behavior control. These changes alter how your brain works and contribute to the compulsive and destructive behaviors of addiction.

## Debunking Myths About Addiction

Myths and misconceptions about addiction are harmful and make it harder for people to recover.

**Myth:** Overcoming addiction is a matter of willpower. You can overcome addiction if you genuinely want to.

**Fact:** Like cardiovascular disease damages the heart and diabetes damages the pancreas, addiction disrupts the brain. Addiction alters your brain structure, impacting the areas responsible for decision-making, judgment, learning, and memory. These changes result in powerful cravings and compulsions that are extremely difficult to overcome.

**Myth:** Drugs like opioids are safe to use since they're used to manage pain and are prescribed by doctors.

**Fact:** Prescription opioids are powerful substances that can be useful for alleviating severe short-term pain, such as after surgery or an accident. However, long-term and regular usage drastically increases your risk of becoming addicted. Expired or leftover prescriptions in the home create a dangerous situation for drug abuse. According to the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, most misused prescription drugs were obtained from family and friends, often from the home medicine cabinet.

**Myth:** Addiction is a disease; there's nothing you can do about it

**Fact:** Addiction is a disease of the brain, and there are many treatment options. The brain changes associated with prolonged substance use can be alleviated and even reversed with proper treatment.

**Myth:** Those with addiction have to hit rock bottom before they can get better.

**Fact:** Recovery can begin at any point in the cycle of addiction. The earlier a person seeks help, the easier it is to treat. The longer drug abuse continues, the stronger addiction becomes.

**Myth:** If treatment doesn't work the first time, it won't work at all.

**Fact:** Recovery from drug addiction is a long, non-linear process. Relapse doesn't mean treatment failed and that sobriety is impossible. Rather, it's a signal to get back on track with treatment or try a new approach.

[Click here to learn more addiction myths and facts](#)

## Deaths from Overdose are on the Rise

Drug misuse and abuse are on the rise. In 2019, **72,000** people died from drug overdoses. Deaths from overdose skyrocketed in 2020, with **93,000** people dying from drug overdoses. That's roughly

11 deaths every hour.



Sources: CBS & CDC

## Say "Yes" to Healthy Coping

Addiction is a treatable disease, not a moral failing or character flaw. Just like lifestyle choices regarding diet, exercise, and sun exposure can lead to heart disease, diabetes, and some forms of cancer, addiction can be a result of personal choices. People begin using substances for a variety of reasons, like to relieve stress, forget problems, or feel numb. It's not enough to say "no" to drugs. Lower your risk of addiction by strengthening your support systems and developing healthy coping mechanisms. Say "yes" to cultivating meaningful relationships, hobbies, and interests. Say "yes" to healthy lifestyle choices and connecting to your community.

[Listen to Emotion Well Episode 3: Opioid Epidemic - Get the Facts](#)



## Put Your EAP to Work

As your Employee Assistance Program providers, our job at EFR is to help and guide you and your family members through difficult life phases. If you, your child, or other family member are experiencing difficulties in life, please give us a call at **800-327-4692**. To learn more about your EAP, visit [efr.org](http://efr.org).

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Emotion Well is EFR's podcast. September is Suicide Awareness Month and in this episode we hear from Destiny Welsh Teixeira who shares how her family found ways to cope after her brother took his own life. Destiny shares how her faith and family got her through a challenging season of life and how her family and the community continue to honor her brother Andy's life.

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Looking for further readings on a variety of health and wellness topics?

Check out our monthly blog posts! September is Suicide Prevention Month, and understanding the risk factors, warning signs, and how to talk with someone experiencing suicidal thoughts can help equip you to intervene in a crisis before it becomes a tragedy. Talking about suicide may never be an easy conversation, but it can be a life-saving one.



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