

The Cycle of Addiction

The “cycle of addiction” is a predictable pattern of going from using, to a decision to stop or reduce, followed by a plateau and confidence, with eventual reduced commitment and selective memory, ultimately moving into justification and rationalization for possible limited use. By the time you relapse, you have often convinced yourself that it’s OK or even a good idea to use again and you are sure it will be different next time.

The cycle of addiction rotates differently for different users. If you are a binge-user, your cycle could be slower which means there is more time between binges than a daily user. Daily users have a quicker cycle, where you may rotate through the cycle of addiction daily or several times throughout the day. This cycle can be arrested at any point, usually after legal, financial, medical, or social consequences force you to stop using. However, if there is an absence of outside help, such as detox followed by addiction treatment and sustained support, your addictive behaviors are likely to return.

This is how the illness operates and takes addicts and families hostage. If you’ve been going around and around in circles and have failed to stop time and time again, this is not your fault – you may not have been aware of your cycle of addiction. If you can identify your personal cycle, you can prepare yourself for the inevitable, predictable pitfalls. If you are serious about recovery, this awareness will go a long way towards helping you avoid relapsing.

Usual characteristics of the cycle of addiction

- You initially used your drug and it felt good. It provided some sort of relief or good feelings for you.
- You became obsessed (or constantly thought of) your drug.
- Over time, you needed more of your drug to feel the same effects. Your tolerance to the drug increased.
- What also increased were the consequences and negative effects of using. These may have intensified feelings of isolation and fear of discovery for you.
- You used your drug even though it was causing harm (physical problems, poor work or study performance, tense relationships).
- You used over and over.
- If and when you tried to stop using, you suffered physical or emotional symptoms of withdrawal, such as irritability, craving, restlessness or depression.
- You did not appear to have control over when, for how long or how much you were using.
- You denied the problems resulting from using your drug, even though these were increasingly obvious to others.
- You hid your drug use after family or close friends mentioned their concern, or out of fear that you would be exposed.

- You may have had blackouts or memory problems relating to your drug use, such as not remembering how much or what you bought on a shopping spree, how much you lost while gambling, what you did at a party when drinking, what you saw or wrote on social media, etc.
- You gradually spent less time on activities that used to be important to you, such as hanging out with family and friends, exercising or going to gym, working, pursuing hobbies or other interests, etc.
- Depression and anxiety became more frequent or uncomfortable.
- You may have been unwilling to see a physician or other health or mental health professionals for fear of being asked questions, or having your addiction exposed.
- You may have come from a psychologically or physically abusive or difficult background. You may have had low self-esteem or felt anxious about your loss of control over your environment.

Did you recognize any characteristics or similarities with your cycle, feelings or behaviors? Hopefully you are starting to develop a more solid understanding of your particular brand of addiction, which will give you a better idea of the treatment you require. However, if you choose not to recognize and treat your disease appropriately, you will be stuck in this cycle until you choose to treat it.

Treatment: A solution

Treatment frees you from the cycle of addiction. You can be freed from being at the mercy of unwanted emotions and compulsive desires.

If you've failed to stop time and time again, even though you've genuinely wanted to, this is not your fault – it is simply the cycle of addiction. This is how the illness operates: addicts are taken hostage.

The good news is ***this can stop***. There are proven methods that will free you from this cycle of doom. However, if you do not seek professional help, it will continue to hold you (and your loved ones) hostage and will continue to impact your health, relationships, career, and eventually your entire life.

Now that you know you need to treat your disease, with help, you can never go back to believing that you are “blameless” and “a victim” to your addiction. It is not yours, or anyone else's fault that you are an addict, but now that you know you can treat it, **it is your responsibility** to treat it!

Your responsibility from now on is to understand your disease, your cycle of addiction and your best treatment and recovery strategies going forward into your new life.

Throughout this program, we will help you find and apply the best treatment strategies for your addiction.

Recommended videos

Cycle of Addiction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPwOQTncGsA> (1:18 min)

The Cycle Of Addiction - Unf*ck Yourself From The Modern World.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsElmMYyzqA> (6:20 min)

Reflective Questions: The cycle of addiction

The cycle of addiction: List **your** examples and timelines for each stage of the cycle.

1. **Active addiction.** Behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and duration of your active addiction phase. List examples:

2. **Guilt and remorse.** Behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and duration of this phase.
List examples:

3. **Abstinence.** Behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and duration of this phase.
List examples:

4. **If you have engaged in re-thinking.** Behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and duration of this phase.
List examples:

5. Do you use daily? Weekly? Are you a binge-user or a “top-up” user? How would you describe the use of your drug?

6. When have you tried to stop using or cut down in the past? What has led you back to picking up your drug?

7. What do you say to yourself when you are fantasizing about using your drug?

8. Do you feel a sense of relief when using? If not, when did that sense of relief stop and why did you continue using your drug? List examples. If you did still feel a sense of relief, describe what the relief was from. Can you think of other ways to find that relief now? If not, this program provides strategies you can use, and you can call or message us for tips along the way.

9. At what point do things start to go wrong when you use? Describe that process:

10. Describe times when using brought you more trouble than relief.

11. Have you ever said: “Just once more” or: “I’ll start recovery again tomorrow”?
What do you say to yourself just before you pick up again? How could you
change that self-talk before you actually take your own bad advice?