

Understanding Substance Use Disorder in the Brain

The Brain and Addiction: Why It Matters

Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is a condition that affects the brain. It's not just a choice or bad behavior. **When someone has an SUD, it can actually change how their brain works.** Understanding these changes can help reduce shame and find better ways to help people recover. Addiction can affect how people make decisions, control their emotions, and even feel pleasure. It's important to **know how the brain is affected** to help achieve long-term recovery.

How SUD Affects the Brain

- 1 Changes in Brain Chemistry:** Drugs and alcohol change the brain's chemistry, especially how it makes dopamine. Dopamine is the chemical that makes us feel good and motivated. Over time with drug use, the brain makes less dopamine on its own, so people start needing substances to feel happy, which keeps the addiction going.
- 2 Poor Decision-Making:** The part of the brain that helps with decision-making is called the prefrontal cortex. When someone uses substances, this part of the brain does not work as well. This makes it harder to think clearly, make good choices and stop using substances, even when there are consequences.
- 3 The Brain's Reward System:** Drugs and alcohol give the brain a lot of dopamine, which makes people feel good. But over time, the brain gets used to this and makes less dopamine. This means the person needs more of the substance to feel the same way, which leads to tolerance and addiction.
- 4 Stress and Emotions:** SUD also affects the amygdala, the part of the brain that controls stress and emotions. This can make people more sensitive to stress and emotions, which can make it harder to stay in recovery.
- 5 The Brain's Ability to Recover:** The brain has the ability to change and heal. This is called neuroplasticity. With the right treatment, therapy and healthy habits, the brain can recover and get back to functioning its best over time.

Five Quick Tips for Your Recovery

- 1 Exercise Regularly**
- 2 Do Mindful Activities**
- 3 Eat Healthy**
- 4 Stay Connected**
- 5 Sleep Well**



To get help for you or a loved one, call:

844-535-7291



Or visit:

BHGREcovery.com



How Treatment Helps the Brain

1

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD):

Medications like methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone lower opioid use and opioid use disorder symptoms. MOUD can help the brain function better, making it easier to stay in recovery and avoid relapse.

2

Behavioral Therapy:

Therapies like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) help people change the way they think and act. These therapies teach new ways to handle stress and triggers, which helps the brain recover.

3

Support and Healthy Habits:

Having a strong support system and making healthy choices like exercising and eating well can help the brain heal. Mindfulness practices, like meditation, can also help people cope with stress and improve brain health.

Ways to Support Your Brain During Recovery



Exercise: Regular exercise can help reduce negative feelings and stress.

Mindfulness: Activities like meditation and yoga may help manage stress and improve mood.



Eat a Healthy Diet: Foods like fish, fruits and vegetables can help support your mind with necessary nutrients.

Stay Connected: Having friends and family around can make a big difference in recovery.



Sleep Well: Getting 7-9 hours of sleep each night.

Conclusion: The Brain Can Heal

Substance Use Disorder changes the way the brain functions, but with the right care and treatment, you can recover. **Recovery is about more than just stopping substance use—it's about helping the brain function its best.** With patience, effort and support, anyone can regain control and live a healthier life ■

