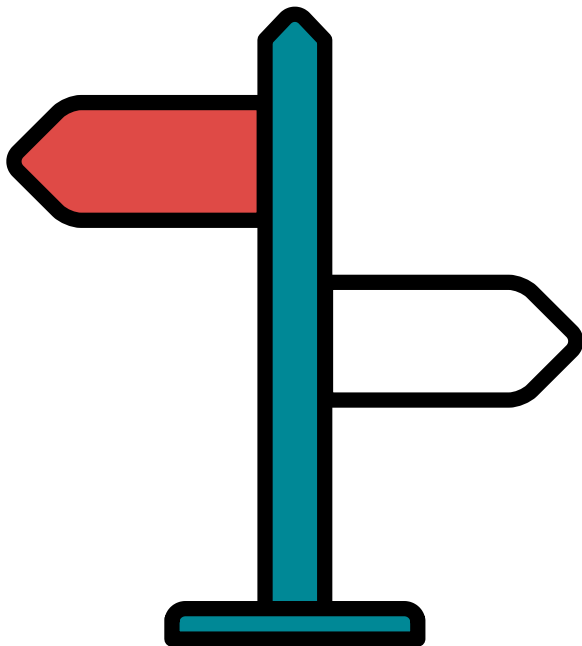


Addiction Factsheet



What is addiction?

Addiction can be defined as not having control over doing, taking or using something to the point where it could be harmful to you. There are lots of ways an individual can seek help, including seeing their GP for advice or contacting a specialist organisation to help people dealing with addiction.

When visiting or in contact with somebody, it is important to remember that whilst you can try and support them, ending an addiction can be a very difficult process and you must not take responsibility for their treatment. If you are approached for advice, you should suggest the person contacts their GP or one of the specialist organisations listed under ‘Getting help’ for assistance.

Types of addiction

Gambling

A recent survey carried out by YouGov estimates that there are nearly 1.4 million problem gamblers in the UK.

The anticipation and thrill of winning creates a natural high that becomes addictive, and the internet has made gambling more accessible. Problem gamblers are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, stress, anxiety and depression and are more likely to end up in prison as a result of criminal activity.

In the same way as other addictions gambling can be successfully treated in time. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) usually produces the best results – details of specialist organisations can be found under 'Getting help'.

(Source: NHS Choices)

Drugs

Individuals with a dependency on drugs are entitled to NHS care in the same way as anyone else who has a health problem. If you are approached for advice suggest they contact their GP where he/she may be offered drug counselling as part of their treatment plan or be referred to more specialist services for further advice and support.

It is important to remember that it is not only illegal substances that can be associated with dependency, but prescription drugs can also become addictive.

Alcohol

Alcoholism is sometimes known as alcohol addiction or alcohol dependence. Alcoholism is the most serious form of problem drinking, and describes a strong, often uncontrollable desire to drink, often starting early in the day and continuing throughout. There are other forms of alcoholism in the form of 'binge drinking' where a person will drink heavily for a period of a few weeks and then abstain before starting again.

Those dealing with alcoholism will often place drinking above all other obligations, including work and family, and may build up a physical tolerance or experience withdrawal symptoms if they stop. If you are approached for advice, suggest they contact their GP or provide details of a specialist organisation.

Other types of addiction include smoking, work, sex, internet surfing and shopping. Solvent abuse is another serious form of addiction and can be fatal.

Signs and symptoms of addiction

Addiction of any sort can seriously affect the welfare of an individual and their day to day living. It can also have the potential to damage families and other relationships so it important to spot the signs. Typically you could look out for:

- Changes in work attendance or performance
- Mood swings, anxiety or depression
- Outbursts of temper
- Withdrawal from responsibility
- A defensive attitude or feeling irritable
- Frequent small accidents or mistakes
- Paranoia or overreaction to criticism
- Secretive or dishonest behaviour
- Feeling distracted
- Sudden weight loss or increase in weight
- Lack of concern over appearance
- Neglected property or possessions
- Tiredness or difficulty in sleeping

Getting help

Gambling

- **Gamblers Anonymous:** A fellowship of men and women who share their experiences, strength and hope with each other, that they may solve their common problem and help others to do the same - www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk
- **Gam Care:** The leading provider of information, advice, support and free counselling for the prevention and treatment of problem gambling - www.gamcare.org.uk or call 0808 8020 133.

Drugs

- **Frank:** The Talk to Frank service provides information about drugs, and advice for drug users, parents and carers. www.talktofrank.com or call 0300 123 66 00.
- **Release:** Free, confidential advice on drugs law for drug users and their families - www.release.org.uk or call 020 7324 2989.

Alcohol

- **Drinkaware:** An independent charity working to reduce alcohol misuse and harm in the UK. It assists people to make better choices about drinking - www.drinkaware.co.uk or call 020 7766 9900.
- **Alcoholics Anonymous:** Concerned solely with the personal recovery and continued sobriety of individual alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help - www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk or call 0800 9177 650.
- **Adfam:** The national charity working to improve life for families affected by drugs and alcohol - www.adfam.org.uk or find a local support group - www.adfam.org.uk/help-for-families/finding-support.



Other

- **The Masonic Charitable Foundation:** www.mcf.org.uk or call 0800 035 60 90 to gain access to the Counselling Careline.
- **The MCF's Advice and Support Team** are able to offer advice, guidance and support on a range of issues including where to go for support with addiction. Contact them by calling 0800 035 60 90.
- **Your Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner** may be able to signpost you to local support and assistance.

Why not watch the MCF's 'Almoner's Tale' video on addiction - www.mcf.org.uk/almoner

You may also be interested in reading our mental health factsheet.



The information contained in this factsheet is intended for general guidance only and does not constitute advice. The MCF does not endorse any of the organisations listed.

