

## Causes of addiction

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Well, experts and researchers aren't in complete agreement about what actually causes addiction. The thing that we know is that it takes one exposure to this substance or a specific behavior, and then it takes repeated exposure to it over and over again. So, that may sound kind of simple or as if I'm dodging the point and I don't mean to, but what we know is that it is partially genetic, but not completely genetic. We call it epigenetic. So you could have a family history of it, and you can develop the disorder. And you can have a family history and not develop the disorder. So we think that genetic influence plays a role. But then that environment that a person lives in, the things that they're exposed to, the things in their life that matter. That's where epigenesis comes in. So the environmental interplay with the genetics. So we don't have one thing that we can point at for a cause we think it comes from a lot of different things. It's, it's sort of, if you will, a confluence of factors.

## Dangers of isolation, finding online recovery communities

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So one of the things about our current environment is that right now a lot of people are in, in what's called social isolation or social distancing. One of the things that we know at least about people who are in recovery, so they've had an addiction, and they've gone through some treatment process, or maybe some self help and they're working on a recovery plan. And this could be short term; they've been doing it for a couple of weeks, to long term; they've been doing it for years, maybe decades. One of the things that contributes to relapse is being isolated, being cut off from people. One of the other factors that we know plays a role is stress and anxiety. So and I think right now, a lot of people are experiencing all of that. You know, we're trying to be more distant from others. We're trying to isolate ourselves for the health of ourselves and and that effect that we have on other people, the public. And so for people who are in recovery, this can be especially trying time in the recovery community. It sort of exists by by being connected. And that's one of the big things that that's really supportive to people who are either struggling with addiction or struggling with recovery, or doing great with recovery. It's being connected to other people. So whenever that is pulled away from us a little bit like, oh, wait a minute, you know, this makes me really uncomfortable. Now, I would say at the same time, you know, we don't have to fully experience it. People don't have to experience social isolation to truly be isolated. There are recovery communities that are online. So there are ways to connect with other people. Now back to, you know, the earlier part of the question I mentioned, anxiety, as is something that can drive people to either often drink more or use more or smoke more, or experience or relapse. And one of the things that we know about addiction is that when people are on nervous or anxious or depressed, that they're not feeling good. And that they often go, 'Well, maybe I'll just have one more drink,' or, and that one slides into two or maybe it slides into five. Same thing with cigarettes, you know. They have a cigarette, and then that becomes four in a row. People often lose count. And that's the other piece about this, the social distancing and social isolation is that people perceive it as more unstructured time. So that also contributes to people having an opportunity to escalate use, and not having a lot of peers

to watch them, or peers to know what's going on. So they're not getting good, accurate social feedback.

## Ways to help and telehealth

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So there's a variety of ways for people to get help. If they're, you know, struggling with recovery or trying to decide maybe if maybe I have a problem do I, do I want to do something about this? Right now is a very good time to sort of step into what we call telehealth or telemedicine. It's a way to make a contact with a health care provider without having to leave your home and go sit in an office. There are a variety of telehealth providers, tele-mental health counseling and telemedicine office visits that are available online. So I always recommend to people first to check through your insurance provider and see if one is preferred or covered. And then to from there, start looking at reviews of different service providers online. You can easily connect. You can make connections with health care providers, and they can do things ranging from assessment and diagnosis. To maybe they say, you know, it might be beneficial if we talk a couple times a week. So that's certainly something that where people can stay connected and stay connected with a healthcare provider. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are a variety of online communities. There's actually, I don't know the exact number, but I would venture, probably a couple dozen different ones that are large and expansive and have a national presence. Each one has something that makes it kind of special and unique. So if you get into an online community, and you maybe you're not feeling it, you just don't like the way that people are talking with or the way that they're interpreting something. There's another one; there's another option to go to. So that's certainly something if you did a quick Google search, you'd probably come up with at least a dozen different ones that you could look at.

## Staying connected to family and friends

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So I think friends and family members are great sources of support. One of the things that we're all experiencing right now is this limited social contact and that takes a toll on us. So for people who are in recovery, it could be taking an active step, picking up the phone. You know, calling a family or a friend member just to make contact; check in: how are you doing? What's going on? At the same time, that friend or that family member could reach out to that person who's also in recovery, and do the same thing. One of those things where we maintain stronger social connections—that's going to support us right now. In meeting our goals, and for a person in recovery, it's continuing that recovery, and having a really good life. People don't like to be disconnected from each other, but it's especially disruptive whenever you're in recovery because we've made connections such a strong part of the identity process. So I would always say pick up that phone. Call. You know, just reach out to to check in with people. Doesn't have to be really long conversations, but staying connected matters. And you could also do that through text messaging or social media. There's not one right way and often probably people will get some kind of combination of factors for them that feels right.

## Being mindful of you own actions

### 7:16

I think one of the things to be mindful of is that right now, especially people have what feels like more unstructured time, we probably have more things to do with less ability to get it done. So sometimes we, we get frustrated and we get anxious, and we might revert to things that make us comfortable. And for some people that could be drinking or for others, it might be going online on Amazon or some other website and shopping. And it's important to pay attention to how much time we're putting into those activities and whether or not they're Contributing to us meeting our goals throughout that day. So I would say if a person feels like maybe things are getting a little out of order, you know, first let's try to see if you can, if you can just course correct yourself. If you're noticing it and you're thinking, 'Man, this isn't quite right.' Then are you able to change that behavior? And and if not, then I would say, 'Well, wait a minute, have you tried recording how many times you did it? Have you just written down?' So if it's smoking cigarettes, for instance, did you record how many you smoked in a day? If it's spending time on on a video site watching videos or something? Now, how many minutes or how many videos did you watch? And then after a day or two of that, sit with that and look at it and see if it feels right, see if it feels excessive, and then consider possibly reaching out through telehealth to talk with a healthcare provider about what's going on and get a professional opinion on steps you might might reasonably take next.

## Living a balanced life

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Well, I think right now especially, it's important for us to try to maintain some semblance of balance in our life. And, and as I've said earlier, it can feel like we have more unstructured time, but we really don't have the same amount of time and we're just going about our activities differently. So it's important that we pay attention to what we're doing. And also if something is causing stress, or anxiety or frustration, let's figure out what it is and if there's a way to to change that, without resorting to one of those activities that's, that's not supportive to our health and doesn't help us reach our goals. One of the things that people can do, for instance, if someone is spending too much time watching TV, or getting too nervous while watching TV is to turn that TV off and set a daily limit. Go, 'You know what, I'm going to watch 20 minutes in the morning, with my breakfast or coffee and an hour at night.' So turning off the 24-hour news channel. The same thing can be said for social media. Take some time for yourself; timeout from it. So that way it gives you the opportunity to focus your energy on things that you need to be productive with. Another thing that we always recommend for for people is to take care of your health. So one of the things that we have to pay particular attention to during this current time is that alcohol, substance use, tobacco use all decrease the ability of the immune system makes it harder to fight illness and that's exactly what we're trying to do is to fight this illness and prevent its spread. So drinking less, smoking less or quitting, you know if that's if that's within your plan, now is a perfect time. And then also, at the same time, exercise an appropriate and moderate amount of exercise, getting outside getting some fresh air, maintaining social distance from people, but giving your body some movement. So you know, being being in social isolation or working from home, working remotely, doesn't mean that you're stuck on the couch in the same seated position all day long. And

that's usually how we relax too. So it's important to get up, move around, try to engage in a balance of activities, and then feed yourself nutritiously as best as you can throughout the day. And then like I mentioned earlier, if you feel like something is out of order, something's not right. Consider using telehealth resources to contact a health care provider.