

finals) or frequent disappointment (e.g. a long distance or dysfunctional relationship).

As this habitual use becomes compulsive and begins to result in negative consequences, e.g. sleeping through a midterm because of a hangover, the abuse develops into addiction or dependency. A person may become confused about whether they are having an ice cream cone as a refreshing break or because they are feeling lonely and depressed. This pattern can be further complicated by an over concern about weight and a need to vomit, purge or get rid of the calories. At this point, eating binges have developed into a serious eating disorder which clearly requires professional attention.

If someone believes that they are behaving in a potentially addictive manner, the Counseling Center is an excellent resource to begin exploring one's concerns about one's behavior.

We gratefully acknowledge the work and effort dedicated by the staff at UCLA's Student Psychological services in providing this information.

The Nature of Addictive Behavior

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The Nature of Addictive Behavior

There is considerable attention paid to the unlawful use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs on campus. This is a significant problem for students - whether they themselves are experiencing difficulty controlling their own use or whether drugs adversely affect their relationship with family, friends or a significant other.

However, there is less understanding about the addiction process and how it is manifest. Research findings indicate major similarities between drug abuse and other potentially compulsive behaviors such as eating binges, compulsive work (workaholism), sexuality, or even being in love (the person who seems to dedicate their life to rescuing significant others at their own expense). Codependency is a popularized term related to this latter concept, and considered by many professionals to be a form of addiction - an addiction to certain relationships (often destructive).

In fact, more recently accepted definitions of addiction do not focus upon drug abuse, but rather a complex pattern of behavior which includes psychological, sociological, behavioral and biological components. When a person is in love, their body goes through physiological changes, like they were under the influence of a drug. Most of us who believe that we have ever been in love can relate to such changes in our level of arousal.

Similarly, if that relationship breaks up, their body will experience physiological changes - including sadness and other emotional changes. Such "withdrawal symptoms" may be different from those of certain drugs such as alcohol or heroin, but the addictive pattern is quite similar.

Another feature of addiction is its progressive nature - if something is good, more of it must be better. A bowl of ice cream can certainly be a satisfying end to a nutritious meal, but this is considerably different than finishing a quarter or half gallon when upset because of a recent disappointment. The pattern is the same when one considers how refreshing a cold beer can be on a hot summer day, whether at a picnic or sporting event; compare this to the individual who drinks a six pack bottle of wine, or pint of scotch when feeling sad.

Another common compulsive behavior is that of working long hours. Everyone should be engaged in some productive behavior for self satisfaction as well as financial support and contributing to the welfare of the community. However, productive endeavors can also be pursued to the extreme. A single parent who is working a full time job while taking a full time academic load is clearly at risk. What should be considered is the fact that his or her children are also at risk. Such a life style may develop compulsive qualities that help the person maintain such a heavy workload. Yet, this person would have less time for taking care of her own (in addition to the child's) emotional needs. So, she develops a habit of going without getting her emotional needs met. This

can undermine her self-esteem and that of her children for their needs will also go unmet. A woman with this workload will frequently begin to feel unappreciated and needy. This will in turn affect the quality of relationships she develops, which then may be fertile ground for the continuation of a destructive cycle.

The addiction process has predictable stages regardless of the behavior. Initially, the person indulges in the behavior in an experimental or naturally occurring fashion. Usually the behavior in question has naturally rewarding consequences. During certain periods, however, a person may engage in the behavior in a maladaptive manner. Examples of situational maladaptive behavior might include: getting high the night before a major exam; staffing oneself at a meal following a major exam; devoting long hours to study or work in order to avoid thinking about conflict in a relationship; or going out for the purpose of having a "sexual fling" with someone new just to express anger or to get back at a significant other. This period of misuse is often a sufficient signal for some that they should be cautious so that this behavior doesn't get out of hand. For others, such situational misuse goes unchallenged and leads to another stage of the addiction process.

Misuse can continue and evolve into habitual use; where the individual begins to engage in the maladaptive behavior with some regularity. It can be healthy to occasionally reward oneself by having an ice cream cone for exercising self discipline prior to completing a paper. . However, it is the repetitive use of ice cream as a reward or to soothe emotional pain that can become habitual. This is especially true during periods of stress (e.g. during midterms or