

# Discovering The Power To Crush Your Addictions

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## Addicted to Dangerous Relationships

The most wonderful date of your life may become your nightmare if you're in the sights of a dangerous man. He may be charming and exciting – boasting about his exciting and lucrative career, but in reality, his profile is not how he makes it appear.

Your grandmother used a term, “bum’s rush” to describe someone who shows up and takes over your life, ruining it before disappearing. Yesterday’s bum is today’s modern predator – and some of these men (and women) have worked hard to attract their prey.

Women who are addicted to dangerous relationships always remember back to a time when their mate was kind and endearing – during the honeymoon period when he turned on the charm and didn’t expose his violent and shifty ways.

Often, women get addicted to the showering of attention they receive, but eventually this line of attentiveness and control gets blurred and you realize you can’t call a friend without him asking, “Who’s on the phone?”

You no longer see your friends because he’s consuming every waking second with you, and you realize he’s in control of everything from your fashion to your finances!

Why wouldn’t a woman just *leave* this situation and not stand for a controlling partner? Some do, but for many, the

addiction to a dangerous relationship grows too strong to resist.

The subtle control over time and behaviors eventually morphs into something more destructive – abuse and violence. The woman hears threats that if she leaves him, he'll kill her.

And it's not all women who are addicted to bad relationships, either! There are plenty of men who succumb to their abusive environment from a jealous, mean wife or girlfriend who controls their every move.

Relationship addiction has nothing to do with physical control – it's all about how they control you mentally. After a fight, they'll cry, promise to change, or even manipulate you into thinking you were the cause of the disagreement in the first place.

If you believe you might be addicted to your relationship, test yourself to see if it's a positive or negative influence in your life. Move into your own residence and separate your finances.

## **Banishing Your Smoking Addiction for Good!**

Whether you start smoking because you thought it looked cool or to fit in with the crowd, eventually smoking becomes an addiction. It's an expensive habit that's not popular in many public places or offices in modern society, even though it was once touted as a healthy habit.

Perhaps the biggest cost of smoking is paid years later in the form of breathing disorders and lung cancer that leads to a painful death. Smokers know all about the risks of smoking - they just can't stop once the addiction takes hold.

Smoking is both physically and mentally addictive. The nicotine in tobacco products is a powerful drug that surges through the bloodstream as smoke is inhaled into the lungs.

This isn't just a cigarette issue, though. Chewing tobacco has the same harmful impact. Nicotine is a stimulant drug that's psychoactive, which means it works directly on brain impulses.

Smokers say that their habit calms their nerves and reduced stress. This temporary pleasure center stimulation easily reaches tolerance level so that more and more nicotine is needed to get the same affect.

With the body conditioned for nicotine dependence, it really is difficult and uncomfortable to quit. Nicotine is as

addictive as illegal drugs like cocaine and heroin, if not more addictive.

By the time smokers are hooked on nicotine, many realize that they really *can't* quit anytime they feel like it. It's not that simple to release the body from years of nicotine overload.

Most smokers will stop smoking at least three times before successfully kicking the habit. They're constantly looking for the newest drug or patch that will help them stop smoking without distress.

Since more than 80% of adult smokers began the habit as teenagers, the longer they smoke, the greater the physical damage. As hard as it is to quit, there are almost immediate positive results.

Smokers who want to quit need to know that after successfully quitting, they actually lower their risk of heart disease after 15 years of being smoke-free. They also benefit people they love when you consider that 3,000 non-smokers die from lung cancer annually because of their exposure to second-hand smoke.

Smokers have several cessation options. Nicotine patches are popular alternatives that can be worn on the arm and used in progressive doses until the nicotine dependence is reduced.

Another method for nicotine elimination is the inhaler. Nicotine gum or lozenges are easy to carry around and less noticeable than using an inhaler. Alternative therapies such as acupuncture, acupressure or hypnosis are other options that many smokers consider more calming approaches to stop smoking.

Relaxation training and psychotherapy can help smokers change their beliefs about the power that smoking holds over them so that they can fight off the physical withdrawal symptoms from breaking free of their nicotine addiction. A new cold laser therapy is a promising approach for rapid smoke cessation, too.

## Breaking Free from Your Alcohol Addiction

At some point, having a drink with friends becomes more than a social event. You find that you don't even go out with the group unless they plan to drink. You've fooled yourself into believing that when you *are* drinking alcohol, you have more fun and you're more outgoing.

What your *friends* talk about is how outrageous you behave and how you'll say anything to anyone. They're laughing at you, not with you. When you're sober, you regret what you said or did.

You also ran up the credit card buying rounds for everyone and you lost money being too hung over to go to work the next day. No matter how tired you are of listening to your family or friends tell you that you have an alcohol problem, in your sober moments you know that drinking is taking over your life.

People tell you to go to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) but you don't think you're like "those people." The truth is, you are exactly where "those people" were when they realized that they were powerless over alcohol and started to do something about it.

Alcohol is readily available at 24-hour convenience stores and in clubs on a nightly basis. It's legal to buy if you're of age, so you can get it anytime the urge strikes. Alcohol

abusers often argue that they can't be an alcoholic because they drink beer or wine, not hard liquor.

Beer and wine may contain a lower percentage of alcohol than liquor, but if you drink enough of it, you get the same result. That's part of the deception - beer drinks are notorious for bragging that they can down a six-pack of tall cans and hardly notice it.

Chemically speaking, alcohol is a depressant - so you may swing from the chandelier during the party, but later you'll crash into despair later. Then you get another drink to stop feeling so bad, and the cycle repeats itself.

Alcohol abuse on a daily basis leads to impaired judgments, reduced coordination, aggression, and is often the fuel that ends with domestic violence or child abuse. The physical impact of drowning the body with alcohol includes nausea, upset digestion, sleep disturbances and eventually liver and brain cell damage.

Coming out of alcohol addiction is a complicated and painful process. Medical supervision is the best way to handle the withdrawal symptoms such as tremors, convulsions and hallucinations.

Once the withdrawal period is over, the process of rebuilding both body and behaviors begins. Nutritional changes are critical to overcome the damage caused by alcohol abuse.

Some drug interventions are useful. Antabuse was the first drug of its kind to prevent the body from breaking down alcohol, so drinking while taking this drug causes extreme physical discomfort. Another promising drug is Topiramate (Topomax), which helps alcoholics reduce the amount they drink or eliminate drinking altogether.

Breaking free from alcohol addiction requires a major attitude adjustment to support behavioral changes. Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon Family Groups are available in most every community for ongoing support of the alcoholic and the family. Other recovery groups and individual psychotherapy can further help overcome alcohol addiction.

## **Exercise – You Really *Can* Get Too Much of a Good Thing!**

With so many overweight and out of shape people in America, exercise seems to be the all-purpose answer to this problem. Unquestionably, exercise is the foundation of fitness and flexibility.

Exercise even helps men and women stave off depression and stress. So how could exercise be bad? Too much of a good thing can become harmful and exercise is no exception.

Actually it's not exercise that's the problem - it's the way exercise is used. When exercise becomes a compulsion that drives you to continue beyond the point of physical exhaustion, then exercise is becoming a detriment to your body.

Setting a regular exercise schedule helps keep the activity level consistent. But sometimes work or family needs interfere with that schedule. If you have an exercise addiction, you'll neglect work or family in order to exercise!

Failing to exercise at the level you think is necessary leads to tremendous guilt. That guilt will probably drive you to work out even longer and harder tomorrow to make up for what you perceive as a weakness.

Exercise addicts will refuse social invitations if the timing interferes with a workout. Even if you're sick, you get up out of bed to run or do aerobics, prolonging your illness and making it harder for your body to fight the viral or bacterial infection.

The extra stress of the exercise eventually damages your immune system. Some exercise addicts are using activity as a way to sustain anorexia or bulimia. But not all exercise addicts have eating disorders.

Men who exercise to the extreme claim it's part of their body building and toning regimen. Excessive exercise results in lower levels of testosterone and higher levels of cortisol - the stress hormone.

This dangerous combination leads to a decrease in bone density and greater risk of succumbing to stress fractures. Instead of building muscles, excessive exercise leads to muscle waste.

To see if you're addicted to exercise, ask yourself these questions:

- Can you take a day off from exercise, even if you're exhausted or injured?
- Do you spend a large amount of time recording in an exercise journal and critically analyzing the results?

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- Do you only feel good about yourself when you meet your exercise goals?
- Do you feel like a loser or get irritable if anything interrupts your exercise regimen?

Exercise addiction requires psychotherapy to deal with the false beliefs you may have about body issues and in order to rebuild self-esteem. Depression or anxiety that rises when cutting back on exercise may need to be treated with an anti-depressant or anti-anxiety medication.

## **Food Addictions – What Are You Really Hungry for?**

When food becomes more about emotional hunger than physical hunger, you could be at risk for developing a food addiction. A dysfunctional relationship with food can involve over-eating or starving. In either situation, food is a weapon turned on the self in ways that are unhealthy and sometimes life threatening to an individual.

These aren't the occasional situations like over-eating at a holiday buffet or joining in on the late night pizza party. That kind of over-eating is situational and you can get back to normal eating with minor effort.

Food *addiction* goes beyond those situations - it's a craving that drives a person to eat well beyond what it takes to satisfy basic hunger cues. With food addiction, the real "hunger" is emotional, not physical.

The dynamics of food addiction are similar to that of alcohol addiction or smoking. Each of those addictions involve a craving for something that's damaging to the body in excess.

You can go cold turkey to give up smoking or alcohol as part of changing behaviors, but you can't give up food. Refusing to eat leads to another kind of eating disorder, so it's no improvement.

Unlike alcohol or smoking, food isn't what's harmful - it's the way food is used that causes the problem. Food addicts actually get little pleasure from eating. They aren't pigs without discipline – they're people who are locked in a negative relationship with food, often suffering guilt after a binge.

Food addicts often hide food and eat secretly so that friends and family won't know how much they're eating. They sometimes eat foods that are stale, overcooked, undercooked or half frozen.

Food addiction is never just about eating habits. It's as much a psychological issue as it is a physiological one. Not all food addicts are overweight, either! Many are underweight to normal weight.

If the food addiction becomes bulimia with bingeing and purging, then the individual may not gain weight because of induced vomiting or excessive use of laxatives.

Like a drug addict constantly on the lookout for a fix, the food addict is always thinking about food. This person will talk incessantly about food, finding a place for lunch, getting a snack at break time or stopping at a fast food drive through on the way home from work before dinner!

Food addicts need medical and psychological help to overcome this disorder. You need a complete physical to identify and treat any problems such as diabetes, food allergies or thyroid.

You also need counseling with a mental health professional who specializes in eating disorders. Changing the way you deal with food starts with filling the emotional void that's driving your food addiction.

## Gambling With Your Future

Just take a chance - you might win big! The lure of easy money is powerful. What if you could spend a single dollar and win millions in the lottery? You start out buying one ticket, then another and another - but you never win anything substantial.

You might win twenty dollars and use it to buy more tickets. Once you get the gambling bug, it's a short step from buying a lottery ticket at the convenience store to pulling a chair up to the slot machines in a casino.

With so many online gambling sites, it's easy for anyone to gamble – even those who are underage, and teenage gambling addictions are growing. The sites *say* you have to be over 18 or 21, but who's checking the IDs?

Teens are three times more likely to get addicted to gambling than adults. Some rack up thousands of dollars in gambling debt before they're even old enough to get a driver's license!

Gambling is a hidden addiction because it's more likely to be done in secret than on a night out to a casino with friends. As the addiction increases, gambling interferes with work, social, mental and physical aspects of your life.

Up to 4% of Americans have a gambling addiction. If you find that you crave the thrill of risking money and hoping

to win big, then you're an "action gambler." But if you're more likely to gamble when you're upset or in some type of life crisis, then you're an "escapist gambler." Women are more likely to be escapist gamblers while men are usually action gamblers.

If you realize that you're driven to gamble and it's taking over your life, then you need to get help. You can't beat this on your own. Gambling is an addiction as powerful as drugs or food. Here are some tips to help you break the addiction to gambling:

- Tell your spouse, significant other, parent or someone close to you. Ask for their support as you confront your problem.
- Reduce your access to money. Cut up your credit and debit cards. Carry only small amounts of cash in your wallet.
- Change your path. Stay away from places that are triggers to gamble.
- Stay away from people who encourage you to gamble. If necessary, change your cell phone number or email address so that they can't contact you.

Contact the nearest Gambler's Anonymous group. You and your family members need to attend this group to know what to expect. And find an experienced counselor who can work one-on-one with you.

## Illegal Drugs Invade Every Demographic

The long-term effects of illegal drug use will imprison your body and your brain in ways that are permanently damaging. Just because street drugs are illegal doesn't mean they aren't readily available if you're looking to buy.

Drug users hang out with other users - and you can bet there's a drug dealer nearby. Drug users like to argue about what *is* and isn't a drug. Some say that marijuana isn't really a drug, but that's not what the law and medical research says.

Even though some states allow physician-directed use of marijuana for certain well-documented illnesses, that doesn't change the status of marijuana as an illegal drug. Substantial behavioral research has shown that most users of drugs like cocaine, LSD or heroin became drug users with marijuana as their entry point into the drug world, working their way up to harder illegal drugs to achieve a substantial high.

No one starts out with the intent to become hooked on illegal drugs. Many drug users started using illegal drugs with friends. They wanted to be accepted by the group or took a dangerous dare to try the drug.

Some illegal drugs have an almost instantaneous ability to enslave the user while others have a slower, creeping hold.

The excitement of the drugs and the “high” helps them forget about problems, but that escape is short lived.

Once the user comes down from the drug’s effects, it’s like slamming your car into a concrete barrier at 80 mph. The high is gone, a lot of money is spent and you’re left feeling more depressed than before.

As a result of what you did or didn’t do during the drug high, you may also get kicked out of school, lose a job, wreck the car or suffer plenty of other consequences. Instead of dealing with the problem that you tried to forget by doing drugs, now you have *more* problems.

You not only want *more* drugs, but you want *stronger* drugs. It’s no surprise that the progression moves fast among the illegal drugs marijuana, cocaine, crack, crystal meth, heroin and LSD.

Whether you take one or more illegal drugs, your body gets hooked on them. Even though drug use causes horrible damage to the heart and brain, there’s a painful process of withdrawal to get the body back to functioning in a non-drugged state.

Drug withdrawal can be even worse than alcohol withdrawal with tremors, vomiting, sweating and hallucinations. The drugs don’t let go easily and neither does the illegal drug circle.

Naturally, the drug dealer wants to get back a profitable customer, so you have to completely stay away from the places you went while buying and taking drugs. That means you have to build new friendships with sober people who don't just hang around hoping you'll buy drugs.

If your detox was done as part of a drug-rehab program, then complete that program. Stay involved in community groups like Narcotics Anonymous. Don't stop with counseling once you leave the rehab program. Find a counselor or life coach who can help you redefine your life as a drug-free person, return to school or work and discover new ways to enjoy life.

## **Prescription Drugs – Are You Addicted to Your Medicine Cabinet?**

Some might say the most challenging drug addiction is with prescription drugs. Since these aren't illegal and are readily available at your local drugstore, no one is watching over your shoulder to make sure you don't abuse them.

Doctors certainly don't give out medications with the intent that you misuse them. The doctor, the pharmacy and the literature given with each prescription make it clear if a drug has the potential to become addictive.

Some prescription drug abusers know perfectly well what they're doing, while others stumble into the problem unaware of the dangers they face until it's too late. About 20% of Americans currently abuse prescription drugs for non-medical reasons - and the statistics increase annually.

The most commonly-abused prescription drugs are sedatives, tranquilizers, stimulants and narcotics. Each of these drugs has a legitimate medical use, yet each can also become addictive when used improperly.

A prescription drug abuser may be a person who started using the drugs for post-surgical pain or anxiety, and then found that by using them, they could experience a substantial drug high.

These prescription drug abusers will go from doctor to doctor, even traveling out of town, to get new prescriptions. Doctors rely on patients to report their medication use, but those who are addicted often lie to get the prescription refills.

At some point, they may even resort to stealing physician drug pads to write their *own* prescriptions, which is illegal. Others use online pharmacies - both in the United States and in other countries - to satisfy their ever-increasing need for more drugs to sustain their addiction.

Another frightening trend in prescription drug abuse is among teenagers who get these drugs from their parents' medicine cabinets to use or sell to other prescription drug addicts.

What they don't realize is that the harmful effects of prescription drug abuse are just as bad as with illegal drugs. Overuse of narcotics can lead to strokes or breathing problems that end in death.

Stimulants that may provide a major benefit to a young person with Attention Deficit Disorder becomes a psychoactive agent when abused, leading to paranoia, rage, seizures and heart system failure.

The abuse of prescription drugs and over the counter drugs is rising at alarming rates. Emergency rooms and treatment facilities have seen a 300% increase in cases of prescription drug abuse among all age groups.

Medical and psychological intervention is necessary to detox from prescription drug abuse. The body chemistry has been altered by these drugs and must be restored to the right balance.

These drugs may have left behind permanent alterations in the brain function and mental processing abilities. As with any addiction, the underlying issues that drive the addictive behavior must be worked out in psychotherapy.

Group therapy can also be useful, as well as regular participation in community-based program such as Narcotics Anonymous. Prescription drug abusers don't like to go to programs with street drug users because they think they're somehow different, but they aren't.

A drug addict is a drug addict, whether they bought the drug on a dark street corner or stole it from a family member's medicine cabinet. That brings us to the last important step - alert family and friends about the need to lock or remove potentially addictive drugs so that one more access point is denied.

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