

Am I Chemically Dependent?

Denial is the "ego defense mechanism" that allows most casual or recreational users or drinkers to progress from there to **Addiction** or **Alcoholism**. Denial is, very early in **Addiction**, accompanied by justification and rationalization. This whole ego defense concept was developed by Sigmund Freud, and is about all that's left of his work that is still commonly used in treatment of mental disorders these days. Ego defense mechanisms are a normal part of the human psyche. They are the part of our mind that protects us from shock when some one that we love dies. They are the thing that helps us work through failures and disappointment. Ego defense mechanism have names like rationalization, justification, minimization, compensation, and intellectualization. These defense mechanisms are our way of distancing ourselves from a full awareness of unpleasant thoughts, feelings and desires. They are a normal function for most, but for **Addicts**, including **Alcoholics**, they are taken out of proportion and used in a primary mode of thinking. Most **Addicts**, if not in the beginning, certainly as time goes on, are riddled with fear, guilt and shame. To continue their obsessive, compulsive, uncontrollable desire to use their **drug**-of-choice, and satisfy their abnormally strong craving, they will do or say most anything. I think that most people are aware of this, but it's what's going on inside that baffles people.

One of the first telltale signs of a developing **Addiction**, is anger toward anyone who so much as hints at their being a problem with **alcohol** and or other **drugs**. There is often a total rejection of any discussion of the subject. If the **Addict** has substantially progressed into their **Addiction** before they are ever confronted, they will be a little more adept at manipulating any conversation about the problem. This is because they have a well developed "ego defense" in place. They have battled with their own conscience enough to have rationalized and justified a defense for their **drug** based on denial of its being a problem. Most often, the **drug** is actually, in their mind, a helpful thing that makes them more able to cope with some person, place or thing. The chemically dependent "brain" has changed into a highly efficient "Agent" of protection for the **drug**-of-choice.

The flood of, or lack of, brain chemicals, called "neurotransmitters" transforms the **drug**-of-choice into a supplier of "Euphoric Experience". The euphoria experienced by an **Addict** is comparable only to that of sexual orgasm or true love! In fact, in my experience Addiction is, a love affair with a "**Drug**"! Separating an **Addict** from their chosen **drug** is very similar to breaking up a childhood love affair. When a late stage **Addict** begins a treatment episode, or a self help attempt at sobriety, they often become filled with a remorse that is psychologically as traumatic as the death of a loved one. For many reasons, one being an imbalance of

neurotransmitters (brain chemical), the *Addict* will be sullen with a flat affect, and constantly unhappy, when separated from their drug. This is a very critical stage when reinforced motivation to remain *drug* free is needed, and usually has to come from an outside source like a sponsor, counselor or therapist. If you can relate to what I've just said or you can see this in someone close to you, there is a problem that could be life threatening. The disease of *Addiction* is a chronic, progressive, and fatal illness. It is in the same category as cancer or un-addressed diabetes.

Help is mandatory! We, as humans, are not innately equipped to resolve problems as complicated as chemical dependency. Primarily, the psychological aspect of *Addiction* persists long after the physiological problem has been resolved.

Good resources: DrugScreening.org & AlcoholScreening.org

Self help *Recovery* is absolutely possible. I recommend that anyone who can acknowledge a possible problem regarding their dependency to a chemical, seek help as soon as is at all possible. This is not something that you do by yourself, though you must be primarily doing it for "Yourself"! *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Narcotics Anonymous* have success records as good as, or better than, any treatment program. Yet, the winning combination is treatment accompanied by self help and followed up with self help. AA and NA have many sites but their primary Internet addresses are: alcoholics-anonymous.org & na.org.

If you want some good background on treatment and self help, and access to many good resources for *Addiction* help, I suggest: *Addiction: Why Me?*

The sooner a potential *Addict* addresses the "Denial" issue and seeks help, the better chance that the cycle-of-*addiction* will not destroy so many lives. "Sooner" is so important because like many other serious diseases, *Addiction* most often takes more than one episode of addressing the problem. Some success is almost always accompanied by relapse, and requires restored effort and further attempts at overcoming the disease. A good way to look at this is to compare *Addiction* to another disease of epidemic proportions in our society, Diabetes. It is commonly accepted that the first attempt at controlling blood-sugar levels often works for a while and then a regression occurs. This "relapse" is analyzed and new efforts are initiated. Maybe a different *drug* than the first one prescribed is introduced in place of or along with the first. This may work for some time and another elevated level occurs. A serious look at the new diet that was introduced with the original diagnosis, is taken. The point is, that regardless of why the relapse occurred, we don't give up on the diabetic, even though it may very well be that their failure to be able to accept all of the required changes, is at the root of faltering *Recovery*. We must learn to look at *Addiction* from this viewpoint.

If you even think, in your most remote thoughts, that it is possible that you or someone close to you, may have a developing substance abuse problem, Seek Help! The effects of this disease are so far reaching and can affect so many people in so many ways, that it is not something to risk passing off as "no big deal"! Remember that our society often deals with this problem with heavy fines and considerably long terms of incarceration. The disease of *Addiction*, including *Alcoholism*, also often has costs that may include death, for the *Addict* and often even innocent bystanders (drunk driving)! All of these costs seem very far away to the average person until casual use turns into abuse. Don't take this risk. Seek help, sooner rather than later!