



From Abuse to Recovery: Understanding Addiction

Scientific American Editors

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From Abuse to Recovery: Understanding Addiction by the Editors of Scientific American

Addiction is costly on many levels to the individuals affected, their families and society as a whole, but science may soon be able to offer treatment options to make the road to recovery a little smoother. In this eBook, *From Abuse to Recovery: Understanding Addiction*, we tackle the many facets of this complex issue. First, we investigate why and how people succumb to a veritable prison of the mind as Sections 1 and 2 delve respectively into the psychology and the neurochemistry behind addiction. In "Time-Warping Temptations," David Freedman posits how "temporal discounting" can lead us to give into immediate impulse gratification rather than consider the long-term consequences. Later, two articles by Eric Nestler, "The Addicted Brain" and "Hidden Switches in the Mind," break down how both reward and pleasure circuits become overactive and sensitized to our drug of choice. Subsequent sections break out addictive substances individually: recreational drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol and nicotine. In "Bad Combo," Melinda Wenner Moyer looks at the death of Whitney Houston, who overdosed in February 2010 on a deadly mixture of alcohol and prescription drugs. "Alcoholism and Our Genes" by John Nurnberger, Jr. and Laura Jean Beirut is a lengthy story exploring genetic association studies. Since smoking is one of the hardest habits to break, another article, "Hooked from the First Cigarette," by Joseph DiFranza discusses exactly why this is the case. Finally, Section 7 examines new avenues for overcoming addiction. Michelle Solis's piece, "A Lifeline for Addicts" describes addiction as an impairment in reversal learning and a consequence of rigid synapses – an impairment that studies show could potentially be treated, thus making the recovery process easier. While rehab centers, counseling and 12-step programs are effective for many substance abusers, they're also ingrained as the only way to overcome addiction. New research such as this advances our knowledge of the physical component, knowledge that could lead to a more complete protocol that treats both the psychological and physiological aspects of addiction.

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Georgia Evans:

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