

The Myth of Addiction

Some drugs damage the brain while others seem to metabolize quite efficiently causing little or no damage. Alcohol is a good example of the damage that can result from substance use because it is the most widely used drug in the world. Its use dates back at least 5,000 years. Alcohol, when ingested, can be one of the most damaging substances to the brain and body.

Anyone who is a drinker knows that if you drink heavily and long enough, eventually you may mentally and physically crave alcohol. It is widely accepted that many people (but not all) who drink consistently experience bodily changes from metabolizing alcohol. These changes may or may not include brain tissue. Nonetheless, the brain must deal with any physical changes caused by alcohol use.

The brain, as well as the rest of the body, adjusts to accommodate the excess simple sugars consumed in the form of alcohol. When a person sobers up after an extended period of active drinking, the nervous system has difficulty immediately returning to its sober normal state. In extreme cases, the inconsistencies among the brain and body result in delirium tremens (DT's) or other withdrawal symptoms. Alcohol withdrawal is characterized by body shakes, abnormal sweating, convulsions, and in severe cases, death. Should the person experience these symptoms and survive, the symptoms usually subside within two to ten days. The body is an amazing mechanism.

Once the person has stopped drinking and has survived withdrawal, the nervous system is no different than it was prior to drinking. This, of course, does not mean that the individual does not need additional medical care. Frequently, the side effects from heavy drinking, such as malnutrition, electrolyte imbalances, or heart, liver, pancreas and kidney problems, may require additional medical attention. That being said, symptoms of "physical dependence" caused by the action of alcohol on the nervous system are completely reversed should the individual quit drinking for five to seven consecutive days.

This is important, because there is much research that has attempted to show that heavy [alcohol use](#) (and other drugs) has a permanent destructive addictive affect on the brain, even after alcohol or drugs are no longer being ingested. However, all of the permanence research has failed to prove the permanence theory. Furthermore, the validity of this research is supported by the millions of severe alcohol users who have exhibited the classic withdrawal symptoms, survived, sobered up and moved on with their lives with no treatment, whatsoever.

The substance use treatment industry has lagged far behind the current scientific understanding of substance use. Ninety percent of treatment in the United States is still tied to the religious paradigm of the 12-step model formed in 1935. There are few, if any, industries in the United States, today, that use 70 year old technology. Nonetheless, the substance use industry continues to hang on to its outdated and ineffective theory and methods.

With the substance use industry's adherence to its old technology, it has been unwilling to shake the idea that the human brain is hard-wired and easily corrupted by substance use. To further confuse the situation, not only does the substance use industry hold on to the religious-based AA methods, but the industry then mixes its religious teachings with Neuroplasticity and localizationism. These conflicting beliefs have been tossed together in an effort to explain the false assumption that people are powerless over their actions.

The term powerlessness was used in conjunction with substance use for the first time in the 1930's by a failing, drunken businessman named Bill Wilson, one of the co-founders of AA. Wilson was not a scientist, nor did he have a clue as to what happened in the brain or bodies of heavy substance users. He based his theories about alcohol problems on his own perceived personal weaknesses. He drank a lot and it affected his life negatively. Therefore, from Wilson's experience, well...everyone who drinks or drugs too much must be powerless. Science never once entered into the picture.

If Wilson and his band of early AA member had one talent, it was for marketing. They marketed the idea of powerlessness and disease based addiction so well that it trumped common sense and became the accepted theory. For seventy years Americans have relentlessly been handed the powerless card and have fallen prey to its child-like allure.

With the advent of neuro-imaging, the science of neurology became the newest way to look at "addiction." Yet, during the second half of the twentieth century, powerlessness had become the accepted religion of the substance use industry. For that reason, all new avenues of research were developed and often were corrupted to support the already accepted powerlessness norm no matter how false or inaccurate the claims were.

Based on the new sciences, the "addiction movement" became, and continues to be, an amalgamation of religion, Neuroplasticity and localizationism. Originally, "addiction" grew out of the 1930's fundamentalist Christian group known as the Oxford Group. The Oxford Group was the predecessor of all 12-step groups and a myriad of other new age alternative programs. Subsequently, localizationism was added to support the erroneous claim that the brain cannot be changed back to a normal state once

substance use has changed the brain to the addicted state. Neuroplasticity was incorporated into the addiction treatment industry late in the 20th century. Neuroplasticity offered a plausible explanation as to why people become “addicted.” In order to make the addiction theory fit into the idea of a neuroplastic change, this credible science was distorted; misrepresenting that substance use irreversibly changes the brain. Hence, the substance abuse industry built a fail-proof (but flawed) paradigm using a hand-picked mixture of religion and science that resulted in the notion that everyone who abuses substances will need treatment, forever.

One must wonder where this train wreck started. If we back track, it all begins with the foundation of the belief in powerlessness. Are people truly powerless? Certain facts tell a very different story. People get over substance use and abuse all the time. It is quite common. Consider, the fellow who drank for twenty years and then finally said, “Enough is enough.” He was tired of losing everything and just stopped. Or the woman who concluded, “I lost my kids, and I said to myself, I am done with cocaine! It’s over! I am going to move on and build a better life for my children.” And, she did.

The list of people who stop on their own without treatment[†] is endless; there are hundreds of thousands in the United States every year that stop destructive behaviors on their own. If the brain were unfixable, then all Neuroplasticity would be in question. It is not. Neuroplasticity is the natural state of the brain – it is built to adapt – both ways – all ways!

[The St. Jude’s Retreat House in NY](#) State has been educating people for over 17 years on methods to alter their thinking, their habits and their personal choices as a means to overcome counterproductive substance use and life issues. For more information on these topics and methods, you can contact the [St. Judes Retreat House](#) or the [Baldwin Research Institute](#) at the links provided. People *can, and do get over* their “addictions,” and it all begins with the personal choice to no longer accept the falsity of the addiction theory!

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