Addiction is a brain disease. Though addiction cannot be cured in every case, like other chronic diseases, it can be treated and managed.

Drugs change the brain’s structure and how it works. Like other parts of the body, the brain can heal. When a person stops using drugs, over time their recovery includes an increase in brain activity. Treatment can help drug users reduce the effects of drugs on their brain and behavior, and regain control of their lives.

Research shows that combining treatment medications with behavioral therapy is most successful. This is called Medication-Assisted Treatment or MAT.

**Treatment medications** relieve withdrawal symptoms and help reduce the strong craving for drugs.

**Behavioral therapies** can:
- Help people engage in drug misuse or abuse treatment
- Provide encouragement in avoiding drug use
- Change attitudes and behaviors related to drug abuse
- Increase life skills for handling stressful events and reminders that bring on intense craving for drugs

Different types of medications may be useful at different stages of treatment.

**Treating Withdrawal.** When people first stop using drugs, they may go through withdrawal. This can cause many symptoms, including depression, anxiety, restlessness, or sleeplessness. Some treatment medications reduce these withdrawal symptoms and make it easier to stop using drugs.

**Staying in Treatment.** Some treatment medications help the brain gradually adjust to being without the abused drug. Medications help reduce drug cravings and have a calming effect on the body. They can help the person focus on counseling and other drug treatment therapies.

**Preventing Relapse.** Triggers are the reminders of drug use. The most common triggers that can cause a relapse include people or places where the person used the drugs, being around drugs, and stress. Medications
are being developed to reduce the power of these triggers, prevent relapse, and help the person stay in recovery.

**Treatment must focus on the whole person.**
Recovery from drug misuse is a long and complex process. When people begin treatment, addiction has often taken over their lives. Drug use has controlled their every waking moment. It has disrupted how they function with their family and friends, and at work. To be successful, treatment must focus on the drug user’s medical, mental health, social, work, and legal needs.

One difficulty is staying in treatment long enough to function well again. That is why finding the right treatment for each person is so important. Drug abuse treatment is not "one size fits all."

**Relapse Does Not Mean Treatment Failure**
Drug addiction is a chronic disease. That means it stays with the person for a long time, sometimes for life. A person with addiction seeks and uses drugs compulsively, despite the harm it can do. The chronic long-term nature of drug addiction means that people are likely to relapse and use drugs again.

For people recovering from addiction, a relapse is a return to drug use after quitting. The relapse rate is how often symptoms of a disease come back. The relapse rate for people with substance use disorders is similar to people with diabetes, hypertension, or asthma. All these illnesses have both physical and behavioral issues as part of the disease. Treatment of chronic diseases involves changing behaviors that have become a regular pattern in a person's life. For a person recovering from drug addiction, a relapse means it is time to restart, adjust, or change their treatment plan. It does not mean treatment has failed.

People and their family members who are dealing with mental or substance use disorders, or both, can call the National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357. This is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service. It is available in English and Spanish. The National Helpline provides referrals to local treatment centers, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free brochures and other information.