

# 10 Things Everyone Needs to Know About Addiction

by Dr. Scott Dunbar  
Master Addiction Counselor  
678-773-1975

1. **No one is unaffected.** This is an equal opportunity disease. Nobody is too smart, too rich, too religious, or too cool to be immune. Addictions are in every neighborhood, every church, every profession, and in most families.
2. **Addiction/alcoholism is a disease.** It is not a weakness any more than diabetes or heart disease. There is a genetic link that runs in families. This has been shown in identical twin studies where they were raised in different families. Like all diseases, it is marked by identifiable symptoms and has a predictable course.
3. **The earliest signs of a genetic predisposition to alcoholism are high tolerance and blackouts.** When you hear people bragging about how much they can drink or how they got so wasted that they don't remember, you are looking at probable alcoholism. Later signs include financial, legal, vocational, relational problems, physical withdrawal signs, and continuing to drink in spite of all these problems.
4. **Alcoholics and addicts drink and use drugs for the same reasons as everyone else, to change how they feel.** Later they use to prevent withdrawal, because they are physically sick; and to get temporary relief from the shame and guilt.
5. **Regular and prolonged use of mood changing chemicals actually change the brain.** Any chemical that changes how we feel does so by manipulating our neurochemistry. When used repeatedly, our brains shut down receptor sites and stop making our own natural neurochemicals; thus, withdrawal and craving. It takes years for the brain to return to normal.
6. **Treatment works.** There are a wide variety of treatment programs. Everything a person needs is readily available. Many people find what they need in AA or one of the 40 different 12 Step programs modeled after AA. There are outpatient programs, in-patient programs, short and long-term recovery homes, detox, etc. Like all chronic diseases, relapse is a constant danger. Ask any smoker.
7. **It is not true that you have to wait for someone to ask for help.** The earlier the intervention the better; and there are lots of ways to do an intervention, not just the one you've seen on TV. Addictions are very serious. They lead to death and cause total havoc to the alcoholic and everyone around them.
8. **The stigma about having alcoholism is the biggest barrier to getting help.** The widespread belief that addicts are weak, sinful, immoral, and deserve our scorn causes people to deny that there is a problem. The average alcoholic drinks for 7 years before anyone in the family talks about it and 3 more years go by before anyone takes action. Hope is not an effective strategy. Action is required.
9. **Some people have addiction plus a second major problem like depression, ADD, mood disorders, or other mental illness.** When this occurs, both the addiction and the other problems need to be treated or nothing will work. In these cases, it's all or nothing.
10. **Addictions are progressive, powerful, baffling, cunning, and patient.** This is way beyond the experience of non-addicted people and can be scarcely imagined. Addictions have the power to take control of someone's life, cause them to violate their values, and keep doing it in spite of the consequences.

**Recovery is not obtained, it is maintained.**

4-15-2008