



Addiction, Is It a Curse?

Dr. Charles Shaffer

A friend of mine who graduated from one of the top medical schools in the US has battled with addiction for 10 years. He is now 11 years into recovery from his battle with opiate addiction. During a conversation we were having, he said he was fascinated by two related questions: is there truly such thing as an “addictive personality” and do people substitute one addiction for another?

My friend concluded that it depends on the model of addiction. There is a covering you describe to yourself as valid and justified. Having a glass of wine during dinner every night may become an addiction for some and may replace another habit, however, there are many different levels of addiction.

As we look into addiction of certain food groups, there is a link between alcohol and food groups that you are able to make into alcohol. My friend has said he was impressed he could routinely substitute one substance or habit for another while in rehab.

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He found that he had a liking for Snickers bars and would drink 1 to 2 cans of Coca Cola, something of which he never did previously.

So, the question rolls to, is sugar toxic? Sixty Minutes did a report about five years ago on this subject. They interviewed a neuroscientist researcher at the University of Oregon who utilized MRIs to conclude that sugar activates the same brain regions that enable a person to consume drugs such as cocaine, alcohol, and other substances.

Dr. Nora Volkow M.D., a psychiatrist at the National Institute of Drug Abuse, has found similar conclusions in her research. She used brain imaging techniques and found some similarities between the brains of obese individuals and individuals who abuse drugs and alcohol. She was able to demonstrate that there is indeed a sugar dependency, even in rats, and sugar and other foods have an addictive quality. She says that Lay's potato chip's slogan is right, "No one can just eat one".

How do I best help my patients who are struggling with addiction to sugar, carbs, and overeating? The most common way to treat addiction is abstinence, but you cannot stop eating, so we have to find other ways to make this work.

We should advocate for a variation of an abstinence model for individuals with food addictions. Like I said before, you cannot quit eating, but you can make conscious choices and stop eating the things that are triggering an addictive response. I would recommend to everyone to avoid foods that are high in sugar. This may seem like a daunting task, as many patients do not seem to like to read labels, but it can be done.

Additionally, when food is labelled as "off limits", it tends to take on a value and a power within its own. A Krispy Kreme doughnut becomes alluring because of its shiny icing. Also, you imagine how incredibly good it might taste and you argue within yourself that just one doughnut is not so bad.

For years scientists have told us that addiction is a brain disease. Since then, we have found that neural mechanisms dominate in the study of obesity. There has been a focus on these mechanisms that give the brain addiction circuitry and demonstrate endogenous opioid receptors and peptides. All drugs of abuse, from nicotine to heroin, cause a powerful surge of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens. The likelihood that drug use participation and reward activity will lead to addiction is directly linked to the speed at which it promotes dopamine release, the intensity of release, and the reliability of release. All of these things subsequently cause an increase need of more, such comes addiction.

Even taking drugs through different routes of administration can influence how likely it is to lead to an addiction. Smoking or injecting intravenously produces a faster, more robust dopaminergic response and is more likely to lead to abuse. So, how does that relate to obesity? Here is the key question: how much do you enjoy that doughnut, piece of pie, or coke? And how fast does it trigger your response?

Our brains do not have an easy way to withstand the onslaught. Addictive drugs, for example, can release two to ten times the amount of dopamine. There becomes a point where compulsion takes over pleasure. This is associated with addictive behavior and the memory of the desired effect of the abused substance takes over. This can be related to the craving process that causes you to look in the refrigerator or kitchen cabinets.

You are in a learning stage and we are trying to teach your brain to form healthy habits and choose differently. We are retraining your brain, if you will. The hyper campus in the amygdala stores information about environmental cues associated with the desired substance so it can be retrieved again. For example, when you drive by McDonald's or Wendy's, you may struggle internally on whether or not you need a milkshake.

How do we battle addiction and renew our minds?

Be alert for situations and instances that may take you back to addiction. Recognize what things or foods you may like a little too much and ask yourself why you like those foods. Triggers are important to know, understand, and learn how to avoid. It may be helpful to write your triggers down on an index card and put it somewhere visible on the fridge. Accountability works wonders.

My friend has learned early on to apply critical thinking and logic to his addiction. As he did more research investigating the neurochemistry and functional MRIs, the concept of recovery started to make more sense to him. It's much like the patient who goes to the gas station and while paying, grabs a soda and candy bar out of habit.

I will leave you all with this: we serve a God with hope, full of mercy and compassion. We will always face temptation, but God has promised that there will always be a way out. Giving up the things that hold us back, breaking the chains of addiction, and embracing all the things in store for us is what should be focused on.

Fulfilling your calling in life has an infinite, more significant benefit than anything your addiction can give you. As a song suggests, trade-in your sorrows and shame and lay them down for the Lord. As Jim Elliot, the famous missionary said, “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose”.

It is possible to overcome your addiction to food groups. There are many different avenues of help if you allow us the opportunity to serve you. Your cravings contribute to addiction but also to the relapse of a hard-won battle. Patients who are addicted to carbohydrates are in danger of relapse if they find themselves walking into the bread or pasta aisle. It is a conditioned response; they remember what it is like to have that food group and have convinced themselves it will not hurt.

You can break the chain of addiction, just allow us to help you.

Blessings,

Chuck Shaffer MD

Desire and Disconnects

Tricia Foley, MS, RD

When working with people who want to lose weight I like to start by asking one question, why now?

I get various responses, for some it's because of a medical reason, others an event such as a wedding. What I have learned throughout the years, is although they may desire to lose weight (and have good reason), there may still be a number of disconnects. Unfortunately, despite their desire to lose weight, these disconnects end up sabotaging their success.

These disconnects have one thing in common, we are all oblivious to them! I'm referring to our automatic thoughts and belief systems! To lose weight and keep it off you must start to notice the disconnects in your thinking and be open to making adjustments. This process takes work but is worth it in the end.

Disconnect #1: The difference between Wanting and Feeling

Have you ever had a goal but you just didn't FEEL like doing the things necessary to succeed? We have all been there:

- We want an A on the exam but don't feel like studying
- We want a tidy house but don't feel like cleaning
- We want to lose weight but don't feel like meal prepping
- We want to get stronger but don't feel like getting off the couch

You can thank your primitive brain for that, we seek pleasure in the moment- always! That is how our brains are wired. If we aren't careful though we let the feeling of pleasure in the moment keep us from obtaining our life long dreams. The good news is that feelings are all stemmed from your thoughts. Next time you don't feel like doing something (exercise, cook, write a paper), explore your thoughts. If you can begin to catch your thoughts and change them you can gain momentum. Change your thoughts, change your feelings- get your desired outcome! It starts with awareness.

Next time you don't feel like doing something and would rather relax, consider the longer term consequences and act from that place. I may not feel like cooking tonight but I do want to lose 20 lbs... When was the last time you did something you didn't feel like doing and did it anyway (doesn't have to be weight loss related)- Aren't you glad you did?

Don't get me wrong, the immediate action won't feel great- you will still in the moment wish you were relaxing. BUT- it's worth it! The more we make this shift, the more automatic it will become. This is because the primitive brain likes to be efficient. So in the beginning, change will be uncomfortable and hard, the brain will resist the change and try to pull you back to what is comfortable and familiar. Don't fall into this trap. Remind yourself that over time, the new desired behavior to get what you want will become a habit! It's consistency that counts!

Disconnect number 2: The disconnect between Wanting and Believing

Belief systems can also be a barrier to success, our beliefs are just thoughts that we have thought so many times that they become part of who we are. These are automatic, subconscious thoughts that we believe to be true (even though they may not be!). You have simply just thought or heard something said to you so many times that these sayings become automatic. If you are struggling to lose weight, I would challenge you to take a look at your subconsciousness thoughts and beliefs about weight loss, some common ones are:

- Everyone in my family is overweight, I must just have a slow metabolism. It won't matter what I do...
- Since I've gotten older I can't seem to keep the weight off...
- I've tried everything, nothing works...
- I'll always be overweight...

If you don't believe that you can lose weight or that your genes are working against you, you will get those results. You may want to lose weight, but if you don't believe it is possible, it won't be. You may start taking action but eventually these thoughts, which are very much automatic will creep in and talk you out of staying the course and prove that you are right.

Here is the loop: Thought, Feeling, Action, Result...the result always proves the original thought.

- Thought: I can't lose weight- why bother
- Feeling: Defeat
- Action: Sit on couch and snack
- Result: No weight loss

Start by catching these thoughts...becoming conscious of your own thinking allows space for new thoughts. Be careful with the new thoughts you choose. Avoid replacing negative thoughts with something you don't believe in. For example, just thinking the opposite..”Since I've gotten older weight loss will be easy”. This won't work either, the replacement thought must be something you believe! Instead find a more neutral thought: “I have the ability to do what I put my mind to”. Once you find a fitting neutral thought, replace it with the negative thought. Notice how it feels. This shift will help you to align your Wants with your new Beliefs and get the results you're after!

Here is a revised version of the Thought loop from above...notice how this new thought makes you feel compared to the original examples thought:

- Thought: Losing weight is possible
- Feeling: Hope
- Action: Being accountable, packing meals
- Result: Weight loss

Don't let disconnects derail your ability to reach your goals. The power of your mind is a wonderful thing, use the power to help you regain momentum and spark motivation you've never had before!

The Recipe of the Month

Sparkling Red and Blue Jello

Ingredients

- 3 C cold water
- 3 squirts of Mio Drops (flavor of choice)
- 4 envelopes unflavored gelatin
- 1/3 C Stevia
- 1 C cold sparkling water (LaCroix)
- 1 C fresh strawberries, divided
- 1 C fresh blueberries



Directions

Bring 2 cups water to a boil in a small saucepan over high heat. Add Mio drops to enhance flavor. Meanwhile, pour water into a large heatproof bowl. Sprinkle gelatin over the water and let stand for 3 minutes. Add 1 additional cup water and stir to completely dissolve the gelatin, 2 to 3 minutes. Add stevia and stir for 1 minute to dissolve. Whisk in sparkling water.

Refrigerate until the mixture is the consistency of thin pudding and is just starting to set around the edges, 1 to 3/4 hours. The time will vary depending on the size of your bowl and how cold your refrigerator is. After 1 hour, check every 5 to 10 minutes because it thickens quickly. Gently but thoroughly whisk the mixture until it is uniform.

Stir in berries. Pour into a 9 by 13 inch pan. Cover the pan with plastic wrap, without touching the jello. Refrigerate until very firm, about 3 hours. To test, touch with finger and if it does not stick it is done.

**Delicious, Fun,
Yum.**