



Understanding addiction

Addictions are relatively common. Approximately 3 out of every 100 Canadians are dependent on alcohol or drugs and 3 out of 100 Canadians have problems with gambling. Nicotine is also a major addiction in Canada, with about 17% of Canadians smoking regularly.

So what is an addiction? An addiction is something that is hard to stop and it even interferes with your life. You can be addicted to substances such as alcohol or drugs (e.g., cocaine, heroine, morphine, nicotine), prescription drugs, even to activities such as eating, gambling, video games, work, Internet, shopping, exercise, pornography or sex.

Is food addiction real ?

Amidst the everyday chaos of life, food is one of the simplest comforts. But for compulsive eaters, food is an easily accessible drug used in an attempt to fill a constant void. Associated with anxiety and trauma, food addiction is about more than monitoring what you eat, and can have serious health effects. People with this disorder focus on diets and weight loss, but the underlying issues are not resolved. If you look closely, someone with disordered eating has likely substituted food as a vice to help deal with something else, as others use overwork, alcohol or smoking.



Are you an exercise addict ?

It's hard to fault someone for exercising when most of us spend too much time on the couch. But when fitness becomes the top priority in a person's life, it can signal a dependence, says Kathleen Martin Ginis, a professor of health and exercise psychology at McMaster University.



“ People with an exercise addiction can't stop even if they are sick or have other obligations.” If forced to take time off, they have psychological withdrawal such as anxiety and irritability. Men and women are equally prone to exercise addiction, which affects about three percent of the population. To stay fit and healthy, we recommend 30 to 90 minutes of exercise five days per week.

Source: besthealthmag.ca

4 signs you're an Internet addict

Sure, we all use the Internet constantly these days—but an unhealthy addiction to the Internet is a very real health problem. Watch for these four signs of problem behaviour.

It should come as no surprise to you that Canadians are spending more and more time on the Internet. According to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), we spend an average of nearly 14 hours per week online. However, surfing the web can become an addiction for some people, says Linda Bell, CEO of Bellwood Health Services, an addiction-treatment centre in Toronto that offers both publicly funded and fee-for-service programs. "An Internet addiction is the same as any other addiction—you get [online] and you find that your behaviour becomes out of control," she explains.



Though cyber sex and pornography use are the most common types of Internet addictions, people can also become addicted to online chatting, shopping, gambling and even website surfing. Here's how to tell if it's time to seek help for an Internet addiction.

1. You're spending more time online than with family or friends

Internet addicts will choose to spend time online rather than participate in social activities, says Bell. "I did an interview recently with someone who was into gaming online. He would spend over eight hours a day after work gaming and it was interfering with his social life," she describes. If your Internet use is out of control, you may find that your family and friends question why you're choosing the computer over them or express concern about the amount of time you're spending online.

2. You're neglecting yourself and your work

"We have clients who will be online for 15 hours at a time and don't eat or wash," says Jennifer Kotry, a therapist at Bellwood who treats individuals with Internet addictions. You don't have to spend more than half your day online to be suffering the symptoms of an Internet addiction it's the way your Internet use negatively affects your life that determines whether or not you have a problem, notes Kimberly Young, a psychologist and director of the Center for Internet Addiction Recovery. If you find that your Internet use is causing you to neglect your health, your chores and your work, it may be time to seek help.

3. You're using the Internet to alter your mood

"Those who are depressed are three times more likely to become hooked on the [Internet], those who suffer from anxiety disorders are twice as likely, and those who suffer from an addiction to alcohol and drugs are twice as likely," says Young. Those that compulsively use the Internet may find that going online helps relieve the symptoms of a mood disorder—but the relief is short-lived. A study conducted by the Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society found that the more people used the Internet, the less time they spent in contact with real people, which could lead to loneliness and isolation.

4. You think about the Internet even when you're not online

As with addictions to drugs or alcohol, Internet addicts are constantly searching for their next fix. If you're preoccupied with your next purchase on eBay or tactics in an online game, you may have a problem.

How are family members affected?

Family members usually learn ways to cope with problems linked to addiction.

They may:

- *Communicate less*
- *Avoid talking about the problem or expressing their feelings*
- *Hide the addiction from the community*
- *Take on responsibilities neglected by the person with the addiction*
- *Feel frustrated, angry, resentful, lonely, scared, and ashamed*

Addiction causes and risk factors

There is no single cause of addiction and it can be hard to figure out why some people become addicted and others don't. Researches believe that there are several factors that can influence the development of addiction.

Genetics

There appears to be a genetic link to addiction. If your parents or other family members have struggled with or are struggling with addiction, you have a higher chance of developing an addiction too. But keep in mind that there are other factors that affect the development of addiction.

Your brain

Substances and activities that are associated with addiction all increase the levels of a chemical messenger called dopamine in the brain. Dopamine activates the pleasure and reward areas of the brain, making you feel positive and good. Because these feelings are pleasurable, you want to repeat the behaviour that created the feeling.

Childhood experiences

Some traumatic childhood experience (e.g., emotional, physical, or sexual abuse) can trigger addiction when people seek comfort or an escape from the pain of past experiences. Young adults also may have friends who use alcohol and other drugs, and peer influence can lead to experimenting with addictive substances.

Mental health

Addiction is more common in people with other mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. It is thought that people with mental health issues use addictive substances or activities to help them feel better, but in fact, the opposite happens.

Stress and coping with feelings

Some people may turn to substances or activities to relieve stress or help them cope with certain situations and feelings. Feelings of not belonging as a result of race, gender, or ethnicity can cause people to turn to addictive substances for relief.

Addiction can also be influence by poverty and not doing well in school (either academically or socially).

**One thing researchers know for sure:
addiction is not caused by personal weakness
or lack of willpower.**

There are also factors that can help protect you from the pitfalls of addiction. These factors include:

- having positive role models such as parents, teachers, or family friends
- having a supportive and involved family
- having strong connections with schools and your community
- having plans for the future
- being involved in sports and other activities (e.g., music, dance)
- being involved in the community (e.g., volunteering)

Where to get help

Tel-jeunes

1-800-263-2266

en.teljeunes.com

Free, anonymous, confidential phone & online counseling service for youth. Big or small concerns. *24/7

Parent Helpline

1-800-361-5085

ligneparents.com

Confidential listening service, free advice, answers and professional support for parents of kids and teens (0-20). *24/7

Drug : Help and Referral

1-800-265-2626

drogue-aidereference.qc.ca

Free, confidential and anonymous help and referral. *24/7

Parlons drogue

Parlonsdrogue.com/en/accueil

For information about alcohol and drugs; their effects, why people consume, how to say no, and how to get help for yourself or someone in your circle.

Gambling: Help and Referral

1-800-461-0140

jeu-aidereference.qc.ca/www/homepage_en.asp

Telephone information and help line for pathological gamblers and their relatives and peers. *24/7



If you need assistance in obtaining English-language services, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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