

Myths about Substance Use and Users

PART 1

- 1 Addicts are bad people.**
- 2 Addiction is a willpower problem.**
- 3 Addicts cannot be treated with medication.**
- 4 Addicts should be punished, not treated, for using drugs.**
- 5 Some people just can't change.**

Which of these statements are true?

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PART 11

All of the statements listed are myths.

1 Addicts are bad people.

People who use/misuse drugs and alcohol are not bad people who need to become good or stupid people who just need to be educated. Rather, addiction causes changes in brain activity that can make change difficult (but not impossible).

2 Addiction is a willpower problem.

This is an old belief, based on wanting to blame or shame people who have alcohol or drug problems. Addiction occurs in an area of the brain called the mesolimbic dopamine system that is not under conscious control. People with substance use disorder will have choice and some self-control, but it is compromised.

3 Addicts cannot be treated with medication.

New medicines are being developed to help patients who have already had success in recovery to (1) further curb their cravings for drugs, (2) reduce the chances of relapse, and (3) enhance the effectiveness of existing behavioural and other psychosocial (talk) therapies.

4 Addicts should be punished, not treated, for using drugs.

Science demonstrates that changes on the brain can cause people with drug and alcohol problems to have impaired control over their use of substances. Treatment (talk therapies and – in some cases – medication) is much more effective than punishment.

5 Some people just can't change.

Research actually shows that the more change attempts someone makes the more likely he or she is to eventually succeed. With each attempt to change you learn more about yourself and can gain confidence from the strategies that were helpful. (When it comes to nicotine addiction, there are 42 million former smokers, which shows that addicts can change.)

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