

## UNDERSTANDING THE ADDICTION PATTERN

Anyone can become addicted to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Repetitive use of alcohol and drugs literally changes the chemical patterns of the brain. If and how quickly someone might become addicted to alcohol or drugs depends on many factors including their genes (which they inherit from their parents) and the biology of their body. Alcohol and all drugs are potentially harmful and may have life-threatening consequences associated with their use. There are also vast differences among individuals in sensitivity to various drugs. While one person may use alcohol or a drug several times and suffer no apparent ill effects, another person may be more vulnerable and overdose with first use. There is no way of knowing in advance how someone may react.

But I raise my voice with others throughout the world who warn against abuse of drugs beyond prescribed limits, and the recreational or social use of chemical substances so often begun naively by the ill-informed. From an initial experiment thought to be trivial, a vicious cycle may follow. From trial comes a habit. From habit comes dependence. From dependence comes addiction. Its grasp is so gradual. Enslaving shackles of habit are too small to be sensed until they are too strong to be broken. Indeed, drugs are the modern "mess of pottage" for which souls are sold. No families are free from risk. But this problem is broader than hard drugs. Their use most often begins with cigarette smoking. Tobacco and alcoholic beverages contain addicting drugs. Often, however, agency is misunderstood. While we are free to choose, once we have made those choices, we are tied to the consequences of those choices. We are free to take drugs or not. But once we choose to use a habit-forming drug, we are bound to the consequences of that choice. Addiction surrenders later freedom to choose. Through chemical means, one can literally become disconnected from his or her own will!  
(Russell M. Nelson, *Addiction or Freedom*, Ensign, Nov. 1988, pg.6)

Those who develop an alcohol or drug habit often follow a similar pattern to those found in other addictions. The characteristics of addiction may include three phases: Initial pleasure, Tolerance, and Addiction. Not everyone who uses alcohol or drugs will go through all phases of the addiction pattern.

Initial pleasure. Generally speaking, the use of alcohol and drugs cause pleasurable physical and psychological sensations. The repetitive use of alcohol or drugs begins the addiction process. During this early phase users may experience guilt. If they act on their feelings of remorse and change their behavior, then the use of alcohol or drugs can end. However, if they continue using, the habit becomes stronger and the spiritual aspects of their life decline.

Tolerance. Repetitive use of alcohol or drugs dulls the conscience and weakens resistance. The body actually adapts to the alcohol or drug being used and requires more to reach the high. Progressively users become unsatisfied with the level of pleasure they are experiencing, so they begin to use more frequently, to seek a stronger drug, or to try a different way of getting the drug into their body. A nother symptom of tolerance is the justification of their involvement. The user may think "everyone does it" and "it doesn't hurt anyone." They lie and minimize their problem to those they love and even to those persons trying to help.

Addiction. A third element that can occur in addiction is the increased tendency to use the alcohol or drug despite negative consequences. With alcohol and some drugs, the body develops a dependency on the substance and withdrawal can be painful and at times deadly. In the last phase of addiction most users loose spirituality, recognize a serious problem, and feel helpless to control it. It is at this stage that some refer to as a "disease" or "illness."