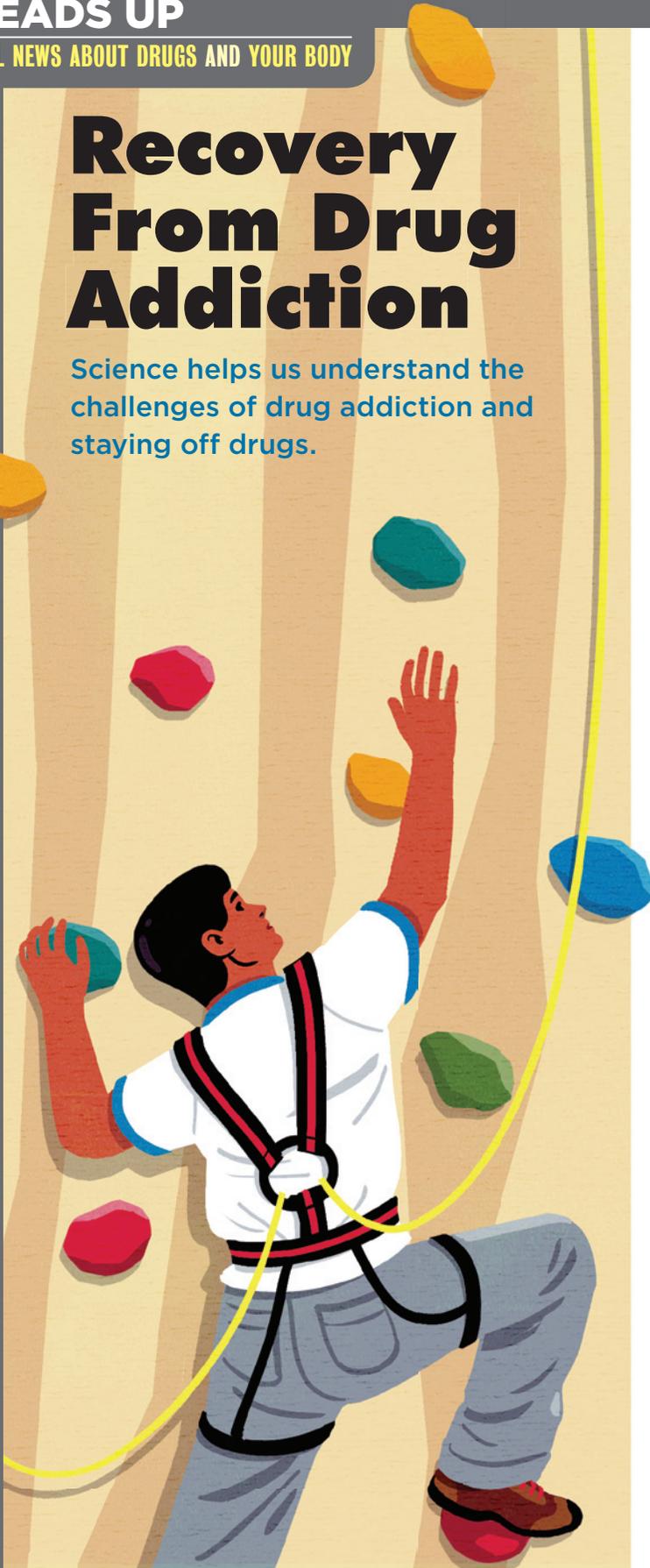


Recovery From Drug Addiction

Science helps us understand the challenges of drug addiction and staying off drugs.



People who are addicted to drugs can't stop using them, even when they really want to. Their priorities change, and getting drugs becomes more important to them than everything else. This happens because drugs change how the brain works. Drug addiction is a chronic disease, like asthma. As such, it often requires treatment throughout a person's life, especially after a relapse. A relapse is when an addicted person starts to use again after a period of time without drugs. Relapse is a sign that more or different treatment is needed. Drug addiction can be treated. But recovery takes time.

Why Do Some People Become Addicted While Others Don't?

A person's risk for drug addiction is affected by several factors:

- **Genetics**—some genes make people more prone to becoming addicted;
- **Family and social environment**—peer pressure, physical or sexual abuse, stress, poor relationships with parents or friends, and availability of drugs all increase risk;
- **Mental health**—some mental illnesses can increase the risk for addiction;
- **Age**—the younger a person is when drug use begins, the greater the risk.

No matter your risk factors, one thing is certain: People who don't use drugs can't become addicted.

Recovering From Addiction

In 2012, 23 million people in the U.S. needed treatment for alcohol/drug use.¹ But only 4 million got treatment. Most people who succeed in treatment commit to a lifelong process of recovery: getting more treatment when needed; living a healthy lifestyle; and counting on loved ones and others in recovery for support.

▶ **More Info:** For additional facts about the brain and drugs, visit scholastic.com/headsup and teens.drugabuse.gov.

Why Does Relapse Happen?

Relapse happens because drugs change the brain's wiring. Once addicted, people can be "triggered" to use drugs. Learning to avoid triggers is something patients with other chronic diseases (such as diabetes) must do to avoid relapse.

What Are "Triggers"?

Triggers for drug addiction can be situations, people, smells, and even songs that remind someone of drugs. These cause the brain to release dopamine (a chemical that signals pleasure) and create intense drug cravings. Triggers are often subconscious—meaning, the person doesn't realize what's happening. Treatment helps people learn to handle triggers without drugs.

Challenges of Recovery

Recovery from drug addiction means overcoming obstacles:

1. Finding and paying for the right treatment—for as long as it is needed.
2. Sticking with lifestyle changes to avoid drug use. Support from family, friends, and/or others in recovery can help.
3. Avoiding triggers such as drug users, parties with drugs, and other things that might cause drug cravings.

Addiction is a long-term condition. Avoiding relapse is a challenge, even after years in recovery. The sooner treatment is started, or restarted after relapse, the faster someone can get healthy.

Recovery: Getting the Right Support

A successful treatment plan for drug addiction puts different types of support together in a way that works for each person's situation. When relapse happens, it's time to adjust the plan. The plan can include many types of support, such as:

Treatment for the addiction

Recovery support groups

Safe, healthy, and fun activities

Support of family and/or friends

Working to complete life goals (e.g., education)

Protection from abuse or trauma

Meditation and self-monitoring

Treatment for mental illness or stress

How the Brain Changes and Recovers From Drug Use



The images² above show that once addicted to drugs, the brain can be affected for a long time, although recovery is possible.

- The first image shows a normal-functioning brain without drugs. A lot of yellow means lots of brain activity.
- The next two images show the brain of someone addicted to cocaine, but who has not used in 10 days and then 100 days. The amount of brain activity (yellow) increases over time.

To Get Help for Drug Problems:

teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-problem-help