

WHY CAN'T I JUST STOP?



The person assures themselves, “Just this one drink, that is all.” After a two-week binge, they wake up and confront all the misery that has passed. In despair, they ask themselves, “Why can't I just stop?”

He knows if his wife found out that he was looking at porn, she would be devastated. And yet, with all the potential fall out, he sits there mesmerized by images on the computer screen. It is only after he is done that he feels great remorse and asks himself, “Why can't I just stop?”

She knows that the report is due. But there is always something else that needs to be done first. Other people and their needs seem to take up all of her time. She is known as the “go-to person” that will never say, “No.” She stays up late, hurrying the report and feels a wave of anger come over her. She wonders why

she keeps pleasing everyone else instead of doing what is best for her. She asks herself, “Why can’t I just stop?” How many times have you uttered these words in a frustrated cry from the depths of your soul: “Why can’t I stop (*fill in the blank*)?”

Frustrated... from the depths of your soul.

OUR EMOTIONS KEEP US HOOKED

No matter what addiction—sugar, cigarettes, drugs or alcohol, gambling, porn, people-pleasing, workaholism—somewhere deep down we are attempting to regulate our emotions: fear, sorrow, need for comfort, acceptance, and to escape pressures. Emotions build and we feel a need to escape. We become emotionally triggered and...off we go. It becomes the path of least resistance.

E.S.C.A.P.E.S.

When we feel anxious, we long to be comforted. In other words, we do things to regulate our emotions. The trouble with comfort is that it can become an end to itself. Drugs comfort for a while, but it is not a

legitimate comfort. Overeating, gambling, pornography, being emotionally enmeshed with someone, sex—there are all sorts of ways to get “relief.”



But these comforts do not come from legitimate resolutions to a situation or painful emotion. It is just a temporary escape. So, we trade acceptance, love, and nurture for a quick “comfort.” We call these E.S.C.A.P.E.S.

Escapes happen when painful emotions become too much that we escape through the overindulgence of excitement, substance, comfort, avoidance, people, emotionalism, and sex.

E	S	C	A	P	E	S
EXCITEMENT	SUBSTANCE	COMFORT	AVOIDANCE	PEOPLE	EMOTIONALISM	SEX

In moderation each one has its place, but it is overindulgence and dependency on these for relief from painful emotions that cause the trouble. Instead, we were created to be emotionally resilient and to be able to bounce back from painful emotions. *Emotional resilience* means that when painful emotions occur, we are able to return to joy and peace. This is what God desires for us.

FEAR FROM THE PAST; WORRIES FOR TOMORROW

Fear is the number one culprit that keeps us in the need for our addiction. Fear alerts our amygdala which activates our dopamine system. Fear causes anxiety that cries out for comfort. And fear that says, "I must not stop or else I will die!"

Do you think that is too extreme? Then, let me ask you a question.

Question "What would keep a person doing something that is bad for their health, gets in the way of relationships, ends up costing an inordinate amount of money and does none of what it promises?"

Answer "Deeply-held fear."

Did you choose addiction? What started out as a choice has become an obsession. Think about the following questions. When did you decide to keep your cigarettes, sugar, soda, coffee, drugs, or alcohol near you at all times? When did you decide to not skip a day without it? In fact, as you read this, just the thought of being without it starts your heart racing. As your body tightens, you know that it is true. You can feel the fear rise within your body if you even think of being without it.

The number one reason
most people relapse is that they
do not close every door!

They are too afraid to board every window, lock every door, and plug every hole. They must leave a little secret way to get to their addiction.



THE REAL WAY OUT

The real way out is to live for today. Be in the moment. Most of us live in the past or future. We are fearing something from the past—abandonment, the punishment we used to get, being disliked and teased like we were as children. Or we are worrying about the future with all of our negative predictions. Instead, we need to live in *this* moment.

Jesus said,
“Don't worry about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will bring its own worries.
Today's trouble
is enough for today.”

Jesus promised to be with us here in this moment. He said, “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So, don't be troubled or afraid.” The fact is, your future is made up of a bunch of “todays!” The best way to take care of your future worries is to live each today the best that you can. That *is* your future!

ADDICTION IS A LIE

Addiction is a liar. It promises relief, solutions, happiness, and wellbeing, but it does not produce any of that. It is only relieving its own symptoms. That is right—an addiction creates its own need for more, starting the addiction cycle all over again. Don't let this point go past you. Addiction has a rebound effect and a lot of what we feel we need the addiction for is, in reality, the addiction's need to quiet its own symptoms.

Addiction is like having a scraped elbow. The wound forms a scab that begins to itch when as heals. The itch compels us to scratch it, putting the wound back to Square One—starting the re-healing process, which eventually begins itching all over again. What is the real problem? Is it the original scrape, the scab, or the scratching? At this point it's the scratching. If we stop scratching, the wound will heal. Then, we could focus on not getting scraped again!

It is the same with your addiction. If you don't work on what caused the addiction in the first place, you won't eliminate the need your addiction is filling. Instead, you continue in the *addiction loop* by satisfying

the craving your addiction causes. Don't confuse this with not wanting to quit. If you could find a genie and have one wish granted—that you could wake up in the morning with no desire to ever have your addiction again and no fear of quitting—you would jump at the chance. Who wouldn't? Just think of it: no repercussions and no desire for it! Yes, of course you want to quit. And here is the good news: You can wake up that way! You can be a non-addicted person!

ABSTINENCE: LIFE WITHOUT YOUR ADDICTION

What do you believe your life will be without your substance of choice? Many people never find out because they never completely shut the door. They may quit, but deep down they have left the door open, “just in case!” As much as they may dislike or even hate the addiction of their choice, the thought of never having it again actually frightens them. This is the difference between committing to staying sober and being abstinent.



Staying sober means keeping the door open (*I can have just one drink*). But the fact is, it never stops with one. On the other hand, abstinence means I'm going to say no to drinking (*I won't have any drinks*).

If you are like many others who have come to the point of saying, “I have to quit!” you will probably have many reasons why you really don't want to completely shut the door on your habit.

INSTRUCTIONS: Click on the box next to each of the reasons below that you have thought about.

THE REASONS I DON'T COMPLETELY CLOSE THE DOOR

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will live in fear, riddled with anxiety. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Life will be miserable. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will gain 50 pounds. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be bored. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parties won't be the same. | <input type="checkbox"/> Excitement will be gone. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will be a nervous wreck. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be lonely. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will be my boring, wimpy self. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be a wuss. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will be subject to horrible cravings. | <input type="checkbox"/> I would not like myself. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I won't have any true friends anymore. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will never relax. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I could never go back to being me—I've gone too far. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will constantly be in a battle, needing an exhausting amount of willpower |

No doubt, you could list other examples. Our addiction has brainwashed us to this extent.



FACTS

- ✓ None of the things on that list needs to happen to you.
- ✓ You can correct everything on that list.
- ✓ You are not sacrificing anything when you choose to become abstinent.

Rather than sacrificing, you're actually gaining so much more!

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE

Why do you have your addiction? What are you gaining? Before considering the advantages that we think our addiction gives us, we must first understand some of the realities of addiction. Then we can ask ourselves, “Are we really getting what we think we are when we’re involved in our addiction?”

Our body and brain were not made for substance abuse. However, part of our natural protection mechanism is having been created as adaptive human beings. We can adapt to chemical abuse. For a while, the brain will compensate for this influx of substances and still function normally. However, this adaptation was not made for long term use; soon the rebound effect will occur, leading to tolerance and dependence.

Rebound Effect. A *rebound effect* is what happens after the drug of choice (e.g. alcohol, nicotine, sugar) is consumed. The body tries to bring itself back into balance, so it counters against what the consumed chemical is designed to do. This creates the exact same effects you were hoping to escape, except in rebound, the severity of the symptoms is often worse than before you ingested the substance.

- When you take a sedative drug, which causes relaxation and drowsiness, a rebound effect of a heightened agitation occurs.
- With stimulants, like smoking or uppers, the rebound usually causes strong feelings of irritability and impatience. This can lead to higher levels of hyperactivity or trouble focusing.

Ironically, your addiction actually causes the same symptoms you are trying to avoid, but many times worse. The rebound effect causes the same problems we were trying to avoid, we indulge in the addiction again, the next time with an even higher amount. Now, the substance is creating your reason to use again, and your body builds up tolerance.

TOLERANCE

Tolerance is when a person doesn't get the same effect from the same amount of chemical that they experienced originally. So, to get the same effect, it takes more of the substance.

Of course, this only increases the rebound effect. Your withdrawal symptoms—the very feelings you were trying to escape in the first place—will become more severe. The dangers of withdrawal go up, too, which leads to dependence.



DEPENDENCE

Dependence develops when the continual use of the substance disturbs the neurons so that they only function normally in the presence of the substance. After a while, you will need larger doses to get the same effect. Soon you will need it to even feel normal. As your use increases, you will find it more difficult to go without it. Trying to stop will produce intense cravings and even cause you to be physically sick. This is the withdrawal effect in the absence of the substance. These physiologic reactions can be mild (e.g. caffeine) or even life-threatening (e.g. alcohol).

Signs of Dependence

- Having to use it regularly (daily or several times a day)
- Intense urges for the substance
- Needing more over time to get the same effect
- Making it a priority in your life to always have it
- Spending more money even if you can't afford it
- Spending more time getting it
- Using earlier in the day, more frequently, and/or larger dosages
- Feeling physically (pain cues) and emotionally uncomfortable, driving you to use again
- Increase of use when attempting to quit

DOPAMINE INCREASE

Many people confuse dopamine with opiates. They say that dopamine is the “reward chemical.” This is a misnomer. Opiates cause a rewarding effect. Dopamine is the “I have to have it!” urge that excites (actually, agitates) and gets us to the end result. The irony is this: when the opiates bind to the opiate receptors in your brain, they send a message to the dopamine terminal to send *more* dopamine, so the urge to want more continues.



This is what happens when a person keeps eating the whole cake after they are full; keeps smoking even when they hate the smell it leaves in their home and car; or the heroin user has another fix even though they have lost everything that is important to them.

It is a vicious, relentless cycle!

CHALLENGING YOUR EXPECTATIONS

I want to challenge some of the expectations you have about your addiction. There is a field of study called *Motivational Expectancy Theory*. It is all about outcome expectations. It examines what you expect to gain from your behavior. We can ask this about our addiction, too. What are our expectations?

- People that smoke believe that it relaxes them, reduces their stress, and makes them more alert.
- People believe drinking makes them more sociable, happier, and carefree.

The truth is, all the positive expectations we can come up with are just smoke screens. They are lies. Not one is true. It would be like claiming that bank robbery is the answer to all of your financial worries. It may be a temporary solution but one that is the wrong choice and only leads to disaster.

Every one of our expectations—relaxation, reduced stress, alertness, sociability, happiness—can be met without our addictions.

RATIONALIZATION AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Let's look at some psychological principles that come into play in addiction—rationalization, cognitive dissonance, and denial. These are powerful, deceitful mind traps that we need to be aware of and fight against when they happen.

Rationalization A defense mechanism in which controversial behaviors or feelings are justified and explained in a seemingly rational or logical manner to avoid the true explanation and are made consciously tolerable or even admirable and superior.



Cognitive Dissonance The state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and attitude change. In other words, when the perceived image of yourself is in disagreement to your behavior.

Denial A defense mechanism in which confrontation with a personal problem or with reality is avoided by denying the existence of the problem or reality.

In *rationalization*, then, we rationalize, or make excuses for, addictive behavior. This is a common among people with addictions and is usually accompanied by extreme denial. They have many reasons why they should stay involved in their habit. If a person that is trying to cut out sugar is triggered by a box of donuts, it results in an intense inner conflict. They *want* to avoid sugar, but they want to eat the pastry. They rationalize, “I worked hard this morning so I deserve this” or “I can run this off later today when I jog.”

But what causes someone to hang onto their behavior when they know deep in down in their hearts that they are wrong? This is more than rationalization—it is *cognitive dissonance* in combination with *denial*.

Putting It All Together

Our discernment and reasoning are based on the combination of our thoughts, experiences, and senses.

- When presented with conflicting options that disagrees with our perceived image of ourselves, it results in inner conflict (*cognitive dissonance*).
- To return to harmony, we make excuses (*rationalization*) to do what we want to do and refuse to acknowledge (*denial*) that there is a problem.

When this occurs (you want to control your sugar intake and you want to eat the pastry), you must decide between the two; you must believe a reason for doing what you decide to do. This is because the act of violating our self-image—what or who we think we are—must be justified in our own minds because we cannot live with the fact that we are doing something that is in violation of what who we believe we are. No one wants to believe negative things about themselves, so we paint a positive picture.

It is difficult to break through this kind of mental defense, but the truth will set you free!

SO ... WHY ARE YOU STILL USING?

After all this time, you would like to think that you are solving the original problems you set out to eliminate—tension, stress, social anxiety.

- Have you solved them or are you just temporarily escaping from them?
- Has your habit cured any of them?
- Are you gaining the benefits you thought you were going to get?

Or by now, is the source of much of your tension, aggravation, anxiety, and physical ailments caused by the withdrawal from the habit or addiction itself? Are you perhaps, in reality, escaping the heightened effect that using has caused?



**The answer is to
stop using.**

There is no gain in using. Believing that your addiction can fulfill your needs is a false notion. There are much better ways to solve the original symptoms and feelings you set out to eliminate. The withdrawal effects will subside if you let them! You will be amazed at how tension and other symptoms you intended your addiction to solve will legitimately go away when you stop using.

You can do this. You can ride out the discomfort of detox and withdrawal if you are willing to try.

Note: Detoxing from some forms of alcohol and street/pharmaceutical drugs can be dangerous. You should always check with your doctor before trying to stop these types of addictions so you

can avoid serious complications. But don't let this deter you. After it is all said and done, you will be glad you stopped.

I HAVE MY REASONS

Stop and think about it. We do things for reasons. Why are you involved in your addiction? Be honest with yourself. What does your addiction do for you? Use the space below to write down your response. This is not a pass/fail test. You have everything to gain by being honest with yourself.

INSTRUCTIONS: Take some time. Think about what you believe your addiction does for you and use the space provided below to either enter your response electronically or, if you have printed this booklet, write it on the lines provided.

WHAT MY ADDICTION DOES FOR ME

Click or tap here to enter text.

IT'S AN ILLUSION

One of my past hobbies was that of an illusionist. An illusionist presents something that gives the illusion of another reality. The goal is to have your audience see one thing when, in reality, something quite different occurs. Over the years, I have come to see that our brains are master illusionists! How deceptive we can be with ourselves! We present rational sounding reasons for why we habitually do things when, in fact, those reasons are only smoke and mirrors.

When it comes to addictions, the psychological principles of rationalization, cognitive dissonance, and denial are simply ways of thinking that justify what we are doing. Who wants to believe negative things about themselves? So, we paint a positive picture. If cigarettes were good for all the reasons people say they smoke, tobacco would be considered a wonder drug and widely used as food supplements. Likewise, alcohol or cocaine cannot magically cure the things that bother us. These are only forms of escape.

We create ways of thinking that
justify what we are doing.

It is human nature to try to rationalize our behavior with a reason that justifies it. Consequently, it is difficult for people to change harmful habits and addictions when they genuinely believe that there are benefits to what they are doing. This is common with addictions. Even though these justifications are powerful, if we are honest, we can face the truth and find out how wrong we really are. This is the process of *challenging our expectations*. When you successfully do this, there are no good reasons left to continue using. This is when you can find the courage to fight and stop your addiction.

This is the process of challenging our expectations. When you successfully do this, there are no good reasons left to continue using. This is when you can get the courage fight and stop the addiction. Clearly, this is not easy. Many of our expectations have been reinforced for decades through multiple types of media advertisements, the entertainment industry, and the influential stories of others who encourage us to continue the lifestyle that supports addiction.

COMMON REASONS PEOPLE USE

Let's look at some common reasons people give for continuing their addictions.

- It relaxes me and releases tension.
- It comforts me.
- It gets me going.
- It helps me deal with my problems.
- It makes me socially acceptable.
- It relieves boredom.
- It is the only time I can numb out and relieve emotional pain.
- It makes me cool.

IT RELAXES ME AND RELEASES TENSION

Does it really or is it just shutting down the withdrawal symptoms? At one time, it may have felt like it was helping you relax. However, if your addiction really relieved stress, then everyone in high-stress jobs would take it. People that used would be the most stress-free people in the world. But they aren't. Are you genuinely stress-free, or are you stress-free only when you smoke? Stressful situations will come—it's part of everyday life. But when they intermingle with the physical, emotional, and mental stress of rebound withdrawal, your brain releases dopamine which insists that you need your drug of choice again to return to normal. The "true" stress you are relieving, in reality, is the effects of rebound withdrawal which lulls you into the illusion of believing that all your stress is gone. It convinces you that you would be depriving yourself of an effective. Of course, this is simply not true. Like all illusions, you see one thing when, in reality, something quite different occurs. You have the capacity to find real ways to relieve stress, but your addiction exacerbates the situation by delaying any real action toward the real-life stressor. The truth is, when you decide to quit you will reduce a lot of stress and will, in the Emotional Resilience program, learn real ways to relieve stress and tension.



IT COMFORTS ME

Oxytocin is often referred to as the "love" hormone. That is because it initially produces a reaction that is similar to our body's natural way of comforting and soothing us when we share closeness with others. It is true that alcohol, nicotine, and other substances mimic our own natural comforter. However, it is only while the substance is used and only in the early stages that it is able to mimic our natural way of self-soothing. Once in the addiction cycle, tolerance decreases its ability to comfort as we require increasingly more to reach the comfort we seek. Is this real comfort or are you simply calming down the rebound withdrawal effects and reaction to dopamine which signal desire to use again? Are you calming down the agitating need to have another cigarette (false stress) or something that is actually stressful?



IT GETS ME GOING

Comforting and relaxing is one thing, but many people look to their addiction to help them get going and to give them energy. Here again, there is a very real issue with rebound and tolerance. Are you needing the energy and pick-me-up because of your true nature or because you are having a rebound effect that makes you tired, needing a stimulant? Are you needing more of it than when you started because of your tolerance to the substance? If this is true, you are not solving the problem. There



are better ways to naturally feel more energy. Good nutrition and exercise will help. Relieving the internal chatter of lies is another helpful way to release stress which—you guessed it—results in more energy. We need to solve the real issues, not mask them with addiction.

IT HELPS ME SOLVE MY PROBLEMS

This is an illusion. Your addiction makes you numb to your problems. It may provide a temporary escape but in no way is it solving your problems. At best, it may help you temporarily not care about your problems.



But is that solving them? In fact, many times it only exacerbates your situation and causes more fallout. That is like saying that procrastination, because you temporarily forget about your deadline, gets your report in on time. No, it only aggravates it. Likewise, your addiction is not helping you deal with your problem—it is helping you escape from it. The real solution is to be clean from your addiction and allow your brain to function normally. You can find real help with your situation, but the answers do not lie in your addiction.


IT MAKES ME SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE

This is a common misnomer. Many of us experience peer pressure, especially when we are less mature and unable to stand on our own merit and with true confidence. But this is now. What kind of friends would




reject you because you decided to be abstinent? A true friend would be happy for you. But you say, “We have fun and they like me!” That may be true, but don’t give the credit to the substance. Multiple studies about the psychological effect of drinking have revealed significant observations. One study utilized a video camera inside a bar and showed something amazing. Half of the customers were served the alcohol they ordered and the others were unknowingly served *non*-alcoholic beverages. The behavior of those that received non-alcoholic beverages (without knowing it) appeared to be the same—outgoing, engaged, happy—as those that were under the influence. This is because we learn how to be socially active and happy. None of these people needed the substance to provide that for them. Socialization is not artificially produced by substance—it is a *learned behavior*. Substance may have, at one time, helped you be more sociable, but the truth is: You have not needed that for a long time. You can do it without it. In fact, good nutrition, exercise, sleep, some counseling and healthy relationships will be more effective and dependable at helping you with your social abilities than any substance.


IT RELIEVES BOREDOM

Boredom is the result of high arousal that cannot find an outlet. It combines with an inability to concentrate. The final piece to the boredom puzzle is the lack of control over your situation. It causes a daydreaming scenario which is perceived as boredom. This forms a painful agitation that itches to be relieved.  In comes our addiction. We can escape through addiction and our boredom seems to go away. But think about it. Your addiction sets you up for boredom! It agitates you (high arousal), causes you to lose your concentration on anything else (I must scratch the itch), and takes away your sense of control (I must have it). The boredom you feel actually comes from rebound withdrawal. Your addiction doesn't solve the original boredom, it only takes care of the artificial one. It does not cure the situational boredom you may be in. This is not boredom; it is lack of social planning. Your addiction isn't relieving boredom, it is distracting you through what seems to be boredom. If you stop the addiction, you can reschedule your time and take care of true boredom.

IT LETS ME NUMB OUT TO RELIEVE EMOTIONAL PAIN

Who does not want to escape occasionally? This is the purpose of vacation or other time away from work. However, addictions are much more frequent than that. By indulging our addiction, we aren't escaping from the pressures of life through our addiction; we are escaping the dopamine flush that tells you, "You've got to have it! Now!" When we give in to our addiction and succumb to its numbing effect, we relieve this relentless, dopamine-based pressure. After the fact, though, we often experience hopelessness, self-loathing, shame, and guilt. This, too, causes us to want to numb out all over again. But this is not the solution. Why not stop, get the help you really need, and get your life on track? Then you can enjoy those planned, relaxing, and reenergizing activities that come with a substance-free life. 

IT MAKES ME COOL

There is no doubt that our media has portrayed that drinking, smoking, and taking drugs can be cool. Billions are spent on advertising which have successfully planted an image in our minds. But it is far from reality. From what we wear to how we act and look, we are manipulated into a state of mind about ourselves and how closely we fit the lifestyle model media presents. The truth is, addiction is slavery and there is nothing cool about it. Would you recommend it to your children? It is true that as teenagers, when many begin their addictions, it may have been counter-cultural with a cool-kid vibe. But nobody who is enslaved in addiction for years thinks deep down that it is cool any longer. 

YOU HAVE TO DECIDE

So, do you want a solution to this problem or not? You have to decide. Your addiction is not fixing anything. Drugs and alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that make you feel anxious and, at a higher dose, can even alleviate the fear circuit. However, it is a fine line to cross. It's easy to fall into exactly what you've been trying to avoid. As we have discussed, the impairment from using drugs and alcohol creates an even worse scenario in which inhibition is gone and the door is open to uncontrollable behavior. When tolerance and dependence become a reality, you set yourself up for trouble.

Here is the bottom-line question: Is it the substance creating the problems with your addiction or is it the placebo effect? As illustrated in the video-taped experiments, being socially acceptable is based much more in your relationships than in the substance you choose to use. There are better ways to increase your social skills than your addiction. In fact, all that your addiction is doing is helping you hide from and avoid working on the real issues.

You can stop! There is no good reason to continue. Decide, today, to get off the nightmare-go-round and get the help you need.

Thank you!

For more information on this and other subjects be sure to go to www.ronovitt.com

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