

What Are The Risk Factors For Addiction?

A risk factor is something which increases the likelihood of developing a condition or disease. For example, obesity significantly raises the risk of developing diabetes type 2. Therefore, obesity is a risk factor for diabetes type 2.

Although anybody, regardless of age, sex or social status can potentially become addicted to some substances, there are certain factors which may increase the risk:

- **Genetics** (family history) - anybody who has a close relative with an addiction problem has a higher risk of eventually having one themselves. It may be argued that environmental and circumstantial factors that close family members share are the prominent causes.
- Alcoholics are six times more likely than non-alcoholics to have blood relatives who are alcohol dependent. Researchers from the Universidad de Granada, Spain, in [a study](#) revealed that *"the lack of endorphin is hereditary, and thus that there is a genetic predisposition to become addicted to alcohol"*.
- Geneticists believe that the reason some people try cigarettes and do not become smokers, while others do so very quickly is probably linked to the type of genes we inherit from our parents. Some people can smoke once in a while, throughout their lives, and never seem to become addicted, while others are unable to stop smoking without experiencing the unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. It is most likely that the way the receptors on the surface of our brain nerve cells respond to nicotine is influenced by our genes.
- **Gender** - a significantly higher percentage of people addicted to a substance are male. According to the Mayo Clinic, USA, males are twice as likely as females to have problems with drugs.
- **Having a mental illness/condition** - people with depression, ADHD (attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder) and several other mental conditions/illnesses have a higher risk of eventually becoming addicted to drugs, alcohol or nicotine.
- **Peer pressure** - trying to conform with other members of a group and gain acceptance can encourage people to take up the use of potentially addictive substances, and eventually become addicted to them. Peer pressure is an especially strong factor for young people.
- **Family behavior** - young people who do not have a strong attachment to their parents and siblings have a higher risk of becoming addicted to something one day, compared to people with deep family attachments.
- **Loneliness** - being alone and feeling lonely can lead to the consumption of substances as a way of coping; resulting in a higher risk of addiction.
- **The nature of the substance** - some substances, such as crack, heroin or cocaine can bring about addiction more rapidly than others. For example, if a group of people were to take crack every day for six months, and another identical group of people were to drink alcohol every day for the same period, the number of crack addicts at the end of the six months would be a lot higher than the number of alcoholics. For some people trying a substance even once can be enough to spark an addiction. Crack, also known as crack cocaine or rock, is a freebase form of cocaine that can be smoked.
- **Age when substance was first consumed** - studies of alcoholism have shown that people who start consuming a drug earlier in life have a higher risk of eventually becoming addicted, than those who started later. Many experts say this also applies to nicotine and drugs.
- **Stress** - if a person's stress levels are high there is a greater chance a substance, such as alcohol may be used in an attempt to blank out the upheaval. Some stress hormones are linked to alcoholism.
- **How the body metabolizes (processes) the substance** - in cases of alcohol, for example, individuals who need a higher dose to achieve an effect have a higher risk of eventually becoming addicted.