

Standing at the Cross Roads Trying to Quit Using

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Recognizing an alcohol or drug problem is often challenging. The signs are present for a long time but can be masked by the complexities of addiction. To an outsider, changes in personality and behavior might seem like deliberate self-centeredness or other relationship or performance problems. The person struggling with addiction may attribute these signs to a variety of different issues.

Before correctly identifying addiction as the primary source of the problem, the individual continues drinking or using drugs while attempting to regain control. This effort can be a mix of conscious and subconscious behaviors. Those who eventually recover have often tried and failed multiple times to control their use. After years or even decades of declining life quality, they reluctantly quit. However, merely wanting to stop drinking or using drugs is often not enough to achieve and maintain initial abstinence.

People with addiction often make minimal changes in their attempt to achieve their goals. Typically, a less-than-comprehensive lifestyle overhaul hinders their recovery. They continue behaviors that prolong their addiction, such as surrounding themselves with enablers and peers who use substances, believing they can resist temptation despite constant triggers.

They might choose abstinence by choosing a Coke instead of bourbon, celebrating this progress at a bar. Recognizing that certain friendships may hinder their recovery, they might decide to distance themselves in search of a fresh start without harmful influences.

Frequently, they identify one substance as the root of their problems, thinking that substituting it with another will have no adverse effects. Believing that their primary issue is depression, they seek professional help through counseling, often without disclosing their substance abuse, leading to unresolved issues.

In a brave move toward recovery, they might entrust someone else with control of their drugs or finances, only to find themselves in a power struggle over this authority. This cycle of conflict underscores the need for comprehensive help to break free from damaging habits and regain control of their lives.

Many individuals mistakenly believe that setting a goal to abstain from drinking or using for a set period will solve their substance abuse issues. They often dismiss the effectiveness of programs like AA/NA and professional addiction treatment, persisting in their methods despite ongoing struggles with alcohol or drugs.

The reality is that most individuals who achieve lasting recovery initially try to overcome their addiction on their own terms. Some struggle for years or even decades before finding a path to sobriety.

As problematic drinking and drug use progressively worsen, each crisis becomes more intense and frequent, eventually serving as a wake-up call. Whether through family intervention or personal crisis, the goal is to guide the individual quickly toward treatment. Fear and pain can be powerful short-term motivators, pushing individuals to seek the help they need to start their recovery journey. Amid heightened discomfort, they may be willing to follow in the footsteps of others who have successfully achieved sobriety or seek professional help and adhere to their recommendations.

In summary, recognizing and addressing addiction requires a comprehensive approach. Despite attempts to control their substance use independently, individuals often need professional support and significant lifestyle changes to achieve lasting recovery. Early intervention and the willingness to seek help are crucial in breaking free from the cycle of addiction and reclaiming one's life. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from**

its original version, which was previously published in 2010 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.

Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

The transition to recovery is fraught with challenges as individuals typically try to use their preferred methods to regain control over their substance use or to establish abstinence without significant lifestyle changes. Many people initially focus solely on abstaining from their primary substance of choice, overlooking the broader scope of addiction, which can leave them vulnerable to cross-addiction. "Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse" is an invaluable resource, which can guide your understanding of the nature of addiction and how cross addiction can



sabotage early recovery efforts. It offers practical strategies for recognizing and preventing cross-addiction, including developing a relapse prevention plan, adopting a healthy lifestyle, and challenging cognitive distortions that reinforce addictive behaviors.

"Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse" provides the knowledge and strategies to navigate this complex journey successfully.

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