

Cross Addiction - Chasing The Illusion of Control

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

When embarking on life-changing addiction recovery, the initial focus is on disrupting the cycle of addiction by abstaining from substances. Many things can disrupt the early recovery process. Early attempts to stop drinking or using drugs are often hindered not only by a lack of abstinence skills but also by limited awareness of how substance use has impacted their lives over time. Many individuals do not fully grasp the nature of addiction and the essential elements crucial to recovery.

Most people who eventually find their way into abstinence and recovery do so only after numerous failed attempts to regain control over their substance use. They use trial and error to make minimal changes to their lives while hoping to eliminate negative consequences. Some may endeavor to regain control by switching to a different substance before attempting total abstinence. For example, someone experiencing significant issues with oxycontin might believe that life was more manageable when they were solely drinking alcohol, conveniently forgetting the blackouts and arguments over the drinking. Similarly, despite ultimatums from spouses due to DUIs, arguments, memory lapses, and broken promises, individuals may justify continuing cannabis use, often with their partners' tacit approval. Spouses also want to believe that changing drugs will work to solve the problem. However, rarely will changing the drug of choice resolve the issue.

In the pursuit of control through substance switching, individuals in early recovery may find themselves chasing an illusion. The notion that switching drugs will restore control can be compelling for those unable to envision life without substances. Yet, this attempt at control ultimately proves futile and fleeting. Any perceived improvement is temporary, and the underlying issues persist.

The cognitive distortions and defense mechanisms that sustain addictive behavior also contribute to cross-addiction vulnerability. Confirmation bias leads people to seek evidence to justify their beliefs and dismiss contradictory evidence. Thus, the belief that "complete abstinence is unnecessary" is maintained despite experiential evidence to the contrary.

The reduced hostility, improved mood, or minor behavioral changes are interpreted as evidence of progress, and the continuing natural, negative consequences of simply switching drugs of choice are minimized or ignored.

Regardless of the substance chosen, substance use disorder continues to progress, along with its consequences. Substituting one drug for another only perpetuates the cycle of addiction. Any temporary relief is merely an illusion. People with substance use disorder cannot gain control by changing substances. They gain control over the substance by discontinuing its use. It's important to note that while these descriptions apply to most individuals in recovery, there are also those with co-occurring disorders (i.e., serious mental illnesses) that require medically supervised medications that are mood-altering.

Cross addiction is a common phenomenon of individuals seeking recovery from addiction. Continuing attempts to regain control by switching substances, leads to eventually finding themselves trapped in a cycle of cross-addiction. This pursuit of an illusion of control ultimately does not fully address the crucial issues of addiction thus, continuing to perpetuate continued use and ongoing consequences. Sustained recovery requires a deeper understanding of addiction and a commitment to total abstinence, rather than merely swapping one substance for another. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**

"Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse" offers a comprehensive guide to developing a deeper understanding of substance use disorder and thwarting relapse triggers. This guide offers practical strategies and a valuable Cross Addiction Worksheet to enhance self-awareness.

Hubbard House Publishing and
Transformational Endeavors
WWW.PEGGYFERGUSON.COM
WWW.TransformationalEndeavors.Online
peggyferguson@peggyferguson.com

\$9.95

