

What to Expect from Treatment

Elements Behavioral Health

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Foreword by David A. Sack, M.D., Board-Certified Addiction Psychiatrist & CEO of Elements Behavioral Health

Science has come a long way in its understanding of addiction. Years ago addicts were thought to be morally flawed and lacking in willpower. Now, decades of research have proven that addiction is a chronic brain disease similar to heart disease and diabetes, which runs in families and has a strong genetic component.

If your loved one is addicted to drugs or alcohol, you've likely seen them behave in ways that confound, hurt, and even disgust you. This is because once the brain changes in response to prolonged exposure to a substance, the addict is programmed to behave in self-destructive ways. They are no longer able to think clearly, control their behaviors, or make sound decisions. Finding and using drugs becomes the only thing that matters.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that 23 million Americans are in need of substance abuse treatment, yet only two million Americans actually seek help. With a number of important scientific advances behind us, there has never been a better time to get help.

Accepting that addiction is a disease does not mean shirking responsibility. In fact, just like diabetics and individuals with heart disease, addicts must take ownership of their illness and develop the skills to manage it. These skills create the foundation for the life-saving transformation that happens in recovery. We hope this guide on what to expect from treatment will help you move forward and begin to create an extraordinary life. – ***David A. Sack, M.D***

What to Expect from Treatment is brought to you by Elements Behavioral Health | Call (855) 224-8758 to speak with an Advisor about our addiction treatment programs.

Elements Behavioral Health is a family of behavioral health care programs that offer comprehensive, innovative treatment for substance abuse and other addictions and mental health disorders. We are committed to delivering clinically sophisticated treatment that promotes permanent lifestyle change, not only for the patient but for the entire family system.

Promises Treatment Centers (California) are the premier addiction treatment centers in southern California. Led by some of the country's leading addiction specialists, Promises has built an international reputation for innovative addiction treatment and exceptional service. Whether an individual requires detox, residential drug rehab, outpatient treatment, or extended, Promises has been the drug rehabilitation center of choice for more than 20 years.

The Ranch at Piney River (Tennessee) provides comprehensive therapeutic programs that treat the underlying causes of addictions, eating disorders, and other self-defeating behaviors. The Ranch offers innovative therapies to address the multidimensional aspects of the whole person while teaching personal accountability in a safe, nurturing, real-life environment. Located on a working horse ranch, The Ranch offers programs with a variable length of stay, which allows each client to anchor new recovery behaviors needed for lasting change.

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What Is Addiction?

Addiction, according to numerous sources, including the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is a primary, progressive, chronic, debilitating, and often fatal disease. A person can become addicted to, or dependent upon, substances, including alcohol, illicit drugs, prescription drugs used nonmedically, nicotine, caffeine, or even food. A person can also become addicted to certain behaviors, including sex, gambling, work, shopping/spending, or relationships.

The development and manifestation of addiction is influenced by genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors. Without treatment, addiction becomes progressively worse and, in the case of drug or alcohol addiction, can result in death.

Addiction is characterized by impaired control over the use of an addictive substance, distorted thinking, preoccupation with use of the substance, and use of the substance despite mounting adverse consequences. When someone is addicted, they have lost all control over their ability to refuse the substance. Their lives are consumed by compulsive drug-seeking behavior, or the pursuit of the addictive substance.

Addiction affects more than just the addict. It is also called a family disease since everyone close to the addict is affected by the addiction.

What Causes Addiction?

Addiction is a complex and chronic disease similar to Type II diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Like other chronic diseases, addiction has a tendency to run in families (heritability), has an onset and course of development that is influenced by both environment and behavior, and responds to appropriate treatment, which includes significant and long-term lifestyle changes.

It is important to note that no one chooses to be an addict – just as no one chooses to have heart disease or cancer. However, a person's choice of behaviors can and does influence the development of addiction, particularly if the person deliberately and consistently chooses behaviors that have undesirable effects.

How Drugs Impact the Brain

Drugs interfere with the normal functioning of the brain. Some drugs mimic natural brain chemicals, while others release abnormally large amounts of chemicals in the brain or prevent the reuptake process that normally occurs. In both cases, the brain's reward system is flooded with up to 10 times the "feel good" chemical dopamine produced by natural acts such as eating and sex. The effects of drugs take effect almost immediately and can last longer than natural rewards, causing the feelings of euphoria that drive the brain to demand more and more of a drug.

Over time, the brain adjusts to excessive dopamine and other changes in neurotransmitters, and responds by reducing the number of receptors in the reward circuitry. Addicts find themselves unable to experience pleasure, not only from "natural highs" but also from abusing their drug of choice. In an attempt to feel good, or even normal, addicts use higher doses or try stronger drugs. This is known as tolerance and is one of the primary indicators of addiction.

Tolerance leads to profound impairments in the brain, which can be clearly seen in brain imaging scans. Deficiencies in brain chemicals can result in diminished cognitive function, memory, and ability to learn even years after quitting drugs or alcohol.

While the science behind addiction is valuable to know, ***the reason it's important for families and friends of addicts is so that they can support their loved one without blame or shame.*** Although they may have made some bad decisions, your loved one is not a bad person. All types of people struggle with addiction, including highly motivated, intelligent, and charismatic people from good homes.

Addiction Is Treatable

Addiction doesn't have to be a death sentence. It is treatable, and millions of recovering addicts are living proof that appropriate treatment works. While addiction can be treated and addicts can go on to enjoy fully productive lives, it can not be cured. Maintaining a life of sobriety requires constant vigilance, adoption and practice of healthy coping behaviors, positive lifestyle changes, and creation of and reliance upon a strong and caring support network.

You Need Treatment.

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, people do not choose to be addicted, and likewise they cannot simply choose *not* to be addicted. Addiction is a disease that requires intensive treatment that combines "self-management, mutual support, and professional care provided by trained and certified professionals," ASAM reports.

10 Tell-Tale Signs a Loved One Is Struggling with Drug Addiction

1. **Appearing Intoxicated**
 - Impaired speech or coordination
 - Bloodshot eyes
 - Strange smells
 - Deterioration in personal hygiene
2. **Physical Changes**
 - Vague and unexplainable health complaints
 - Changes in appetite, weight, or sleep patterns (e.g., not sleeping for long periods of time, falling asleep at inappropriate times, or sleeping extremely heavily)
3. **Changes in Behavior**
 - Getting into fights, accidents, or trouble with the law
 - Struggling to keep up at school or at work
4. **Keeping Secrets**
 - Hiding drugs or alcohol in strange places
 - Making excuses for drinking more than others or needing a prescription refilled earlier and more often than recommended
 - Finding empty containers or drug paraphernalia in obscure places around the house
5. **Financial Problems**
 - Constantly asking for money
 - Stealing cash or valuables
 - Going on spending sprees
 - Taking out loans
 - Complaining about finances
6. **Risky Decision-Making**
 - Using drugs in dangerous situations such as driving under the influence, sharing needles, or having unsafe sex
7. **Problems at Home**
 - Neglecting family responsibilities
 - Becoming violent toward others
 - Isolating or withdrawing from others
8. **Loss of Interest**
 - Abandoning activities, hobbies, or friends once enjoyed
 - Showing up less and less often for family gatherings or social events
9. **Mood Changes**
 - Sudden and unexplained mood swings
 - Irritability
 - Unusual increase in energy
 - Acting anxious or paranoid (often signs of withdrawal)
10. **Defensiveness**
 - Denying a problem
 - Arguing, blaming others, making excuses, or getting violent when confronted about drug abuse
 - Lying or manipulating others to hide a drug problem

How Can I Tell if My Loved One Needs Residential Treatment?

Even if you know beyond a doubt that your loved one requires treatment for addiction, you may be at a loss to figure out which type of treatment is best. There are several options, including inpatient hospital treatment, outpatient hospital-based treatment, specialized outpatient treatment centers, and residential treatment facilities.

There's no need to agonize over which is best for your loved one, however, since your decision – and that of your loved one – can be based on practical considerations, such as the severity of the addiction, available supports, insurance coverage and/or cost, and personal preference.

For some family members who have a loved one with addiction, the first realization is that something has to change. Things become so intolerable at home, so disruptive to the family dynamic, that everything is in turmoil on a daily basis.

In addition to serious physical, mental, and emotional changes to the loved one, often there have been serious consequences that also impact the family. These may include underemployment, the loss of the loved one's job (being fired or laid off), a demotion or loss of a promotion, accidents or drunk driving arrests, brushes with the law due to intoxication (or in the case of prescription drug addiction possibly forging prescriptions, doctor shopping, or buying the drugs illegally), financial problems, infidelity, and social embarrassment (drunk at family gatherings, work-related parties, events with friends).

If you've had enough of the constant promises to quit drinking or doing drugs that always fail, if you don't know where else to turn, and if you and your loved one are committed to getting help to overcome addiction, you may find that residential treatment is the best choice.

Choosing a residential treatment program is a decision that you and your loved one will make based on consideration of all the above factors. After a thorough interview and assessment of the patient, a personalized treatment plan will be created that will address all of the patient's needs and concerns.

You will have the basic treatment program, as well as a number of options or additional services available through the residential treatment facility. Be sure to ask all of the questions that come to mind, including whether insurance will partially cover treatment, the credentials and licenses of the facility and staff, what's included in the treatment plan and what will incur an extra charge, how long the treatment program will last, and what's included following completion of the active treatment phase (continuing care, additional counseling, etc.). ***Remember that many rehabs will also take your finances into consideration and reduce the cost of treatment to accommodate your particular needs. Don't be afraid to ask about this.***

Remember that the end goal is that your loved one establishes a firm foundation for recovery from addiction and is able to return home better prepared to live a healthier lifestyle, one that's free from drugs and alcohol. The homelike setting of some residential treatment facilities has proven to be highly conducive to the recovery and healing process because the smaller number of clients allows for more individual attention. Residential treatment is one of the most effective ways to recover from addiction and learn the skills to enjoy a healthy, sober lifestyle. Removed from the temptations and triggers to abuse drugs, your loved one will be able to address the issues underlying their addiction and get on the path to lifelong recovery.

Can Rehab Cure Addiction?

It's a heartbreaking situation for many families when a loved one falls prey to addiction. By the time treatment begins, there's usually severe dysfunction within the family or, at the very least, major consequences to the addict. Many family members hope desperately that rehab can cure their loved one's addiction. Although there is no cure for addiction, drug rehab can provide the tools to manage the illness for life.

Why do people go into rehab if it can't cure their addiction? It may be helpful to think of alcoholism or drug addiction as compared with cancer or diabetes or heart disease. While there is considerable research and many promising medications that are being developed for various diseases – including different types of addiction – there aren't any sure-fire cures. Some of this has to do with the fact that diseases affect people differently, and what works well for one person may have little or no effect, or an adverse effect, on another.

When you have a disease, often the best way to treat it is to manage the symptoms, alleviate intense pain, and optimize functioning. In the field of addiction treatment, there are numerous medications that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in helping alcoholics and drug addicts undergoing detoxification to reduce or eliminate cravings and withdrawal symptoms. The purpose is to rid the person's body of substances – and not have them suffer in the process.

What Drug Rehab Can Do

Now to the crux of the matter: What can drug rehab do? In order to be clear-headed enough to benefit from treatment, the patient must be abstinent for a certain period of time. If the patient is going to a full-service residential treatment facility with medically-supervised detoxification services on-site, the first step is to cleanse the body of harmful substances. Otherwise, detox needs to take place in a hospital setting where there is 24-hour medical supervision. Most detox takes only a few days, although individuals with long-term alcoholism, certain drug or multiple addictions, and co-occurring mental health disorders may require a longer detox period. As mentioned previously, medications may be prescribed to help alleviate moderate to severe withdrawal symptoms and to reduce or eliminate intense cravings and urges.

When the patient reaches the point where the harmful substances are out of their body, the active phase of treatment begins. The patient, at this point, may be motivated to become abstinent, or may be resistant to the process. As long as they remain in treatment, there is a better likelihood that they will be able to achieve the goal of sobriety.

If the patient leaves treatment early – say, upon completion of detox – all they will have achieved is a brief period of abstinence. Without counseling and therapy to help them understand the disease of addiction and how to change their behavior, relapse is not only a possibility, it's almost a certainty.

So, the first step in active treatment is learning about the disease of addiction. In addition, the patient learns how to identify and recognize triggers – the people, places, and things that cause them to use.

Next is learning strategies and techniques to cope with intense cravings and urges. There are also various kinds of therapy – individual and group counseling, psychodrama, cognitive-behavioral therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, biofeedback, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and others – that may be part of the individualized treatment plan. Participation in 12-step group meetings is a key part of the overall treatment plan and is the foundation for early recovery, since a strong support network helps the newly abstinent patient maintain their sobriety.

Relapse prevention is critically important during active treatment, since the patient is getting ready to return home, go back to work or school, and begin the process of transitioning back into society.

So what can drug rehab do? It can help your loved one begin the journey to recovery.

What Drug Rehab Cannot Do

Let's be clear. Drug rehab cannot cure your loved one of addiction. Beware of any treatment center that claims they have a cure. The best that can be achieved by going into treatment is a sound foundation for recovery. It's up to the patient – your loved one – to continue to practice the strategies and techniques they learn during treatment, to change their behavior, to set goals and work toward achieving them, and to continue to go to 12-step meetings, counseling and aftercare. In short, once your loved one knows about the disease of addiction and how to manage it, it's up to them to do it.

It's important to understand that some patients relapse following treatment. The most critical period is during the first 90 days. This is the time when your loved one will need the most support from the family and 12-step group network. Sometimes the patient doesn't feel confident enough or is too vulnerable to be able to withstand the stresses and pressures and urges to use.

Some patients may need to return to treatment for a brief period of time or may be able to get back on track by attending more 12-step meetings, talking with his or her sponsor, and participating in counseling available through aftercare. You should not look at relapse as a sign of treatment failure but as part of the chronic disease cycle. There is always hope if the person is willing to examine what led to the relapse and try again.

ASAM describes relapse as a "common feature of addiction." Instead of viewing relapse as an embarrassment or failure, it is acknowledged as part of the disease of addiction.

"People rarely relapse because they didn't get anything out of treatment or they simply didn't want sobriety badly enough," says Dr. Sack. "Instead, the threat of relapse is evidence that many brain changes caused by drugs last long after the drugs are stopped, and that genetic predispositions can be difficult to overcome."

Instead of blame or shame, the hope is that more addicts suffering from relapse will be guided back into treatment with a clearer understanding that long-term treatment and monitoring are required for a successful recovery.

What Should I Expect from Rehab During the First 30 Days?

If you or your loved one is entering rehab for treatment of addiction, or co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders, naturally you have concerns about what to expect. Most of the questions center around what actually happens, or what can you expect from rehab during the first 30 days.

In short, if you have selected an addiction treatment facility that carries certification from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), you can expect that your needs (or those of your loved one) will be met with the highest level of professionalism and a personalized treatment program that addresses the specific addiction and any co-occurring disorders.

But that doesn't tell you what goes on during the first month after a patient is admitted to rehab. Let's take it step by step.

Step 1: Intake Assessment and Interview

The recovery process begins with an initial comprehensive examination and interview of the addict. This step, also called the interview and assessment process, is where counselors and medical staff collect information about the patient's addiction, history, background, any underlying medical conditions, type and duration of addiction or addictions, frequency of use, date of last usage, and other pertinent information. Some medical tests may be required, such as a urinalysis or blood tests.

The results from the intake exam and interview allow the counselors and other treatment staff to create a personalized treatment program for the patient, and to determine the recommended length of treatment.

Step 2: Detoxification

In a comprehensive and integrated treatment facility, such as a residential drug and alcohol treatment facility, detoxification from harmful substances is the required first step. Detoxing from alcohol is popularly referred to as "drying out," though that's a simplified way of looking at it. Similar to alcohol detox, drug detox is the process of removing all traces of the abused substance from the body. All detox is carried out under 24-hour medical supervision and care.

In some treatment facilities that do not have on-site medically-supervised detox services, the patient cannot be admitted to active treatment until they have been drug- or alcohol-free for a period of 48 hours. This means that detox will have to take place at another facility, which should be a hospital that provides detox services. It is critically important that detox take place only under medical supervision, as some withdrawal symptoms – particularly for long-term alcoholism – may be severe or even life-threatening.

Most withdrawal symptoms, however, range from mild to moderate. There are moderate to severe withdrawal symptoms for poly-drug addiction, or long-term alcohol and drug abuse, in some individuals. In addition, those with underlying medical conditions may require special attention during detox.

For many addicts, the period of detoxification lasts from 1 to 3 days, although, as previously mentioned, long-term or multiple addictions may require a longer detox period. During detox,

medications may be prescribed to help ease the symptoms of withdrawal or to eliminate or reduce cravings and urges to use.

Some of these medications also protect your brain by ameliorating the withdrawal symptoms that could damage memory or executive functioning. In fact, much of the damage to memory occurs during withdrawal stages. Hence the need for these protective steps.

Step 3: Active Treatment

While we're referring to active treatment as step three, this is the period of treatment where the real work begins. It's comprised of multiple elements utilizing various treatment modalities and services.

Research shows that patients who complete the full course of addiction treatment have a better chance of staying clean and sober and going on to live full, happy, and productive lives. Checking out early (quitting rehab) is often followed by relapse. The longer a patient stays in treatment, the better their chances are to achieve lasting sobriety.

The hard work in active treatment begins with the patient learning about the disease of addiction, meeting with a counselor who has been specifically assigned to them, meeting in groups, learning how to recognize and identify triggers for using, learning and practicing effective coping skills and mechanisms, and becoming familiar with the concept and process of network support by participating in 12-step group meetings.

Counseling also works to help the patient overcome emotional issues that may have precipitated or become aggravated by the addiction. It is often said that effective addiction treatment focuses on healing the mind, body, and spirit. In line with this, many residential treatment facilities include yoga, acupuncture, meditation and relaxation techniques to help the patient learn how to balance their mental state so that they can better handle cravings and urges to use again.

Another important component of active treatment is relapse prevention. Before the patient can go back home, return to work, and rejoin society, they need to be armed with strategies and tools to avoid relapse. It's one thing to identify the triggers – the people, places, and things that cause addicts to use – and it's another to feel confident enough and have a plan to follow to be able to successfully overcome the cravings and urges to use. This is what relapse prevention is all about.

During active treatment, various treatment modalities may be utilized. These may include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), individual psychotherapy, family therapy, equine-assisted therapy, psycho-educational groups, stress management strategies, fitness and nutritional counseling, yoga/meditation, and acupuncture.

Again, depending on the patient's type and length of addiction, frequency of use, and other contributing or underlying conditions, the length of the recommended treatment program may vary. Some patients are in treatment for 30 days, while others may require 60 to 90 days or longer. Patients with chronic, long-term, and co-occurring disorders may require continuing treatment, perhaps in an extended care program at the residential treatment facility, a therapeutic care center, or a transitional sober living home.

All patients are encouraged to continue participation in 12-step group meetings as part of their ongoing recovery plan (which they develop with their counselor during treatment). And many patients have continuing care or aftercare as part of their overall treatment program.

Family Therapy and Communication

While family therapy has been mentioned briefly, it is a vital part of the overall treatment program. Without better communication between the family and the person in recovery, and education and counseling of family members about the disease of addiction and how to better support their loved one in recovery, no amount of treatment may be enough to prevent relapse. Your loved one simply cannot return to the status quo. Some things will have to change, not only for the person with the addiction, but within the family as well.

Family members should be prepared for little or no communication with their loved one during the first phase of active treatment. The counselor and staff at the treatment facility will advise when it's appropriate and recommended to visit. You can also expect to hear pleas to leave, promises to abstain, stories of how difficult it is, and other requests and/or complaints. This is natural, since overcoming addiction is tough work. Denial, resistance, rationalization, lack of motivation, inability to effectively communicate – all of these may be hurdles your loved one needs to overcome.

Keep in mind that some patients adapt quickly, fully committed to doing whatever it takes to overcome addiction. Others take longer. Family support is the best thing that you can provide for your loved one throughout treatment.

Safe and Supportive Environment

Perhaps most important to anyone considering entering treatment for drug abuse or addiction is that they feel confident they will be in a safe and supportive environment. This is conducive to optimum healing. When patients have the opportunity to stabilize medically and psychologically, they're better able to learn about the disease of addiction, about themselves, what underlying causes and conditions led to their addiction or have prevented them from overcoming it in the past, how to change their behavior, and how to gain the necessary tools to aid in their ongoing recovery.

What can you expect from rehab during those first 30 days? Expect that this is the beginning of the journey. Expect that there will be good days and bad days, times when you feel ready to conquer the world, and times when you are fearful and uncertain. Know that the treatment professionals will work to provide the best foundation possible so that your loved one will be better equipped to manage addiction and live a happy and productive life in recovery.

What Is Drug Rehab Like?

The decision to go into treatment for addiction is a big step, both for the individual who needs treatment as well as their family. Many people who suffer from a dependence on drugs or alcohol say they want to get better, but they never go forward to investigate treatment, fearing that drug rehab is some awful, scary process involving a lot of pain, intense emotions, and no real guarantee of success.

Let's remove some of the mystery right now by answering the question: What is drug rehab like?

Drug Rehab Is Safe

If you've thoroughly checked out the licensing of the rehab and the credentials of the staff and satisfied yourself through personal inspection and asking questions, you don't need to be worried about the safety of your loved one. Most rehabs will allow you to take a tour before entering the facility. This may not work for people who are highly intoxicated, but family members can complete the tour and ask questions.

In fact, drug rehab in licensed facilities with fully credentialed staff specializing in the particular drug abuse or behavior disorder you need is ***the only evidence-based way to recover from addiction***. Look for CARF or JCAHO accreditation to be assured that everything has been checked and evaluated to meet the highest professional standards.

Drug Rehab Is Tailored to Your Needs

Every person's needs are different. Therefore, a personalized treatment plan will be created just for your loved one. There is no one-size-fits-all treatment program. Many individuals abuse more than one type of drug. They may have problems with alcohol abuse and prescription drugs, or alcohol and illicit drugs. They may have a substance abuse and mental health disorder (known as co-occurring disorder or dual diagnosis). Effective treatment requires an integrated and coordinated approach so that each condition is treated simultaneously during the active treatment phase.

Length of Drug Rehab Varies

Depending on the type and length of addiction and the presence of multiple addictions or co-occurring mental health disorders, the length of time in drug rehab will vary. The length of time may also be determined by how much insurance will cover or other financial arrangements made with the drug rehab facility. Some drug treatment programs are 30 to 60 days, while for some addictions it may take 6 months to a year of continuing treatment (possibly transitioning to a sober living facility, halfway house, or treatment on an outpatient basis).

Many Drug Rehab Choices

There are many drug rehab treatment choices available. These include residential treatment centers that range from modest to luxurious, hospital inpatient or outpatient facility, and intensive outpatient retreats. Some people object to rehabs that are "too nice" – but there is no evidence that making people feel comfortable and at home hurts treatment. In fact, the biggest obstacle to treatment is keeping the person engaged and involved. This is a lot easier when they feel like they are in a safe, warm, supportive, and comfortable environment that feels like their home environment.

However, even the best rehab won't be able to deliver positive results without a genuine commitment on the part of the addict to becoming clean and sober. While it's true that your loved one doesn't have to voluntarily enter treatment for it to be effective (as in the case of court-ordered drug treatment), the only way a person can overcome addiction is to invest him or herself wholeheartedly into the program.

Drug rehab isn't easy. It's not something you can do on a weekend and be done with it. Once you enter treatment, you learn about the disease of addiction, how to avoid triggers and overcome cravings and urges, and how to adopt a healthier lifestyle. But treatment is only the first step into recovery. Your loved one will be in recovery for the rest of their life.

So, what is drug rehab like? It's the first step to the rest of your life.

*Call an Elements Advisor today at 855-224-8758.
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