

# Be it alcohol, drugs or apps

Understanding addiction and  
its connection to mental health



A California MCLE  
Competence Issues course



BeiBeiSONG

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- Founder of Essinova, interdisciplinary academy for human development, leadership, and innovation applying neuro- and arts-based methods
- 20+ years of prior corporate and entrepreneurial experience in technology, life sciences, sustainability, financial services and media, in the U.S., China and Europe
- Formerly licensed to practice law in China; visiting attorney with international law firms in NY and DC
- Certified Mandarin interpreter for California Superior Courts

Not uncommon stories in the legal profession -

## From young, ambitious, high achievers ...



## ... to burnout, depression & substance abuse ...

### Attorney substance use + mental health study\*:

- 28%: depression
  - 21%: drinking problem
  - 19%: anxiety
- by ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs and Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

### 2019 Midlevel Associates Survey†:

- “burnout” appeared 95 times (almost 2x that in 2017)
- “Mental health” 24 times (6x that in 2018)

† By The American Lawyer



## ... and even suicide.

Attorney substance use + mental health study\*:

- 11.5%: suicidal thoughts during career
- 2.9%: self-injurious behaviors
- 0.7%:  $\geq 1$  prior suicide attempt

2016 law student survey<sup>‡</sup>:

- 21%: suicidal thoughts in their lifetimes.
- Another 6%: suicidal thoughts within the past 12 months.

\* by ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs and Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

<sup>‡</sup> published in the Journal of Legal Education



# What we will learn today:

## Causes putting lawyers at higher risk

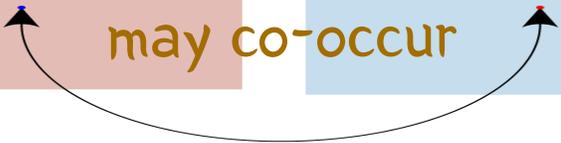
### Mental health issues affecting lawyer competence

- Major types of mental disorders
- Signs and symptoms as manifested in the legal profession
- Early detection and prevention

### Substance and behavioral addictions

- Common types
- Potential consequence and adverse effect
- Signs and symptoms
- Underlying neurochemical processes
- Risk factors

Connected;  
may co-occur



## Self-assessments and resources for help

# Causes of mental health issues in the legal profession

## *External circumstances:*

- Long work hours and constant stress
- Isolation
- Adversarial nature
- Difficult clients
- High-stakes cases / exposure to dire life situations
- Pressure for high income to pay off student debts and “keep up with the Joneses”
- Unpredictable schedules
- “Dog eat dog” work environment

## *Internal factors:*



Maladaptive perfectionism  
 (“unrealistic standards of  
 achievement + hypercriticism  
 of failing to meet them”)



“Superhero”  
 expectation with  
 no room for error  
 or humanness



Pessimistic thinking



Billable hour and prestige

# Causes of mental health issues in the legal profession

## *Cultural factors:*

- Mental health stigma
- Shameful to ask for help, shameful to be vulnerable
- Overwork socially sanctioned, promoted, and rewarded
- Possible to conceal and manipulate reality due to emphasis on outward success and progressive nature of mental illness
- Uneven recognition of problems

***“A perfect machine for stress and burnout”***

***- Arianna Huffington***

# Major mental disorders and their impact on lawyers

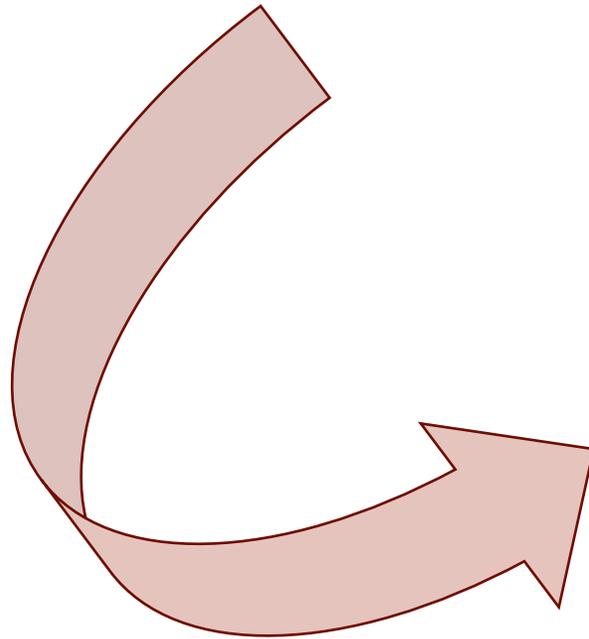
Depression

Bipolar Disorder

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD or ADD)

Anxiety Disorder



Work performance decrease and burnout

Impaired problem solving

Impaired decision making

Poor judgment and ethical irresponsibility

Intervention by colleagues

Discipline by the Bar

## Depression

- Recurrent, severe periods of clear-cut changes in mood, thought processes and motivation lasting for a minimum of two weeks.
- Changes in thought processes typically include negative thoughts and hopelessness.
- Depression also affects sleep/energy, appetite or weight.

Includes persistent depressive disorder, psychotic depression, postpartum depression, seasonal affective disorder, and bipolar disorder.

Sources: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); "Mental Illness in the Legal Profession", Melanie M. Poturica, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

## Signs among lawyers

- Leave assignments incomplete because they cannot concentrate on them
- Procrastinate as it becomes more difficult to be productive. During a depressed period, paperwork piles up, deadlines pass, and emails go unanswered.
- Too depressed to get out of bed in the morning due to a depressed mood, low energy, or lack of sleep
- Unable to communicate with clients, attend meetings, appear in court, and work on client matters.

***One out of five Americans will experience a major depressive episode at least once during his/her lifetime.  
The rate for lawyers is 3-4 times that rate. (The State Bar of California)***

## Bipolar Disorder

- Dramatic shifts in a person's mood, energy and ability to think clearly.
- Individuals with this disorder experience extreme high and low moods, known as mania and depression.

Some people can be symptom-free for many years between episodes.

Sources: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); "Mental Illness in the Legal Profession", Melanie M. Poturica, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

## Signs among lawyers

- Lack of stability
- Happy and fine one day, but not showing up to work the next day due to feeling depressed
- Full of enthusiasm during periods of high energy, taking on heavy workloads; unable to get out of bed during periods of depression

## Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- Persistent, intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and
- Repetitive behaviors that a person feels driven to perform (compulsions) in response to those thoughts.

Sources: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); “Mental Illness in the Legal Profession”, Melanie M. Poturica, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

## Signs among lawyers

- Double-check legal citations
- Over-research a case
- Over-analyze facts
- Not be able to view the applicable law correctly
- Write in a verbose manner
- Argue irrelevant legal positions
- Misread sources, misrepresent facts, and
- Excessively read unimportant things.
- Struggles to make decisions and articulate the reasons for those decisions in a timely manner.

## Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD or ADD)

A developmental disorder and a chronic pattern defined by

- inattention (trouble staying on task, listening);
- disorganization (losing materials); and
- hyperactivity-impulsivity (fidgeting, difficulty staying seated or waiting).

Sources: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); "Mental Illness in the Legal Profession", Melanie M. Poturica, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

## Signs among lawyers

- Struggle to stay organized.
- May fall behind on writing reports and be fearful that they have missed an important point.
- Have a difficult time staying focused on boring tasks, managing their time.
- May lose interest and the desire to finish an assignment.
- May develop reputations for being chronically late, having messy offices, or performing excellently sometimes and poorly at other times.

## Anxiety Disorder

- A disorder characterized by excessive anxiety that can become difficult to control and negatively affect an individual's day-to-day living.
- Generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, OCD, panic disorder, and social phobia.
- Can persist >6 months and get worse if not treated.

Sources: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); [Nat. Inst. of Mental Health, Anxiety Disorders](#) (undated); "Mental Illness in the Legal Profession", Melanie M. Poturica, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

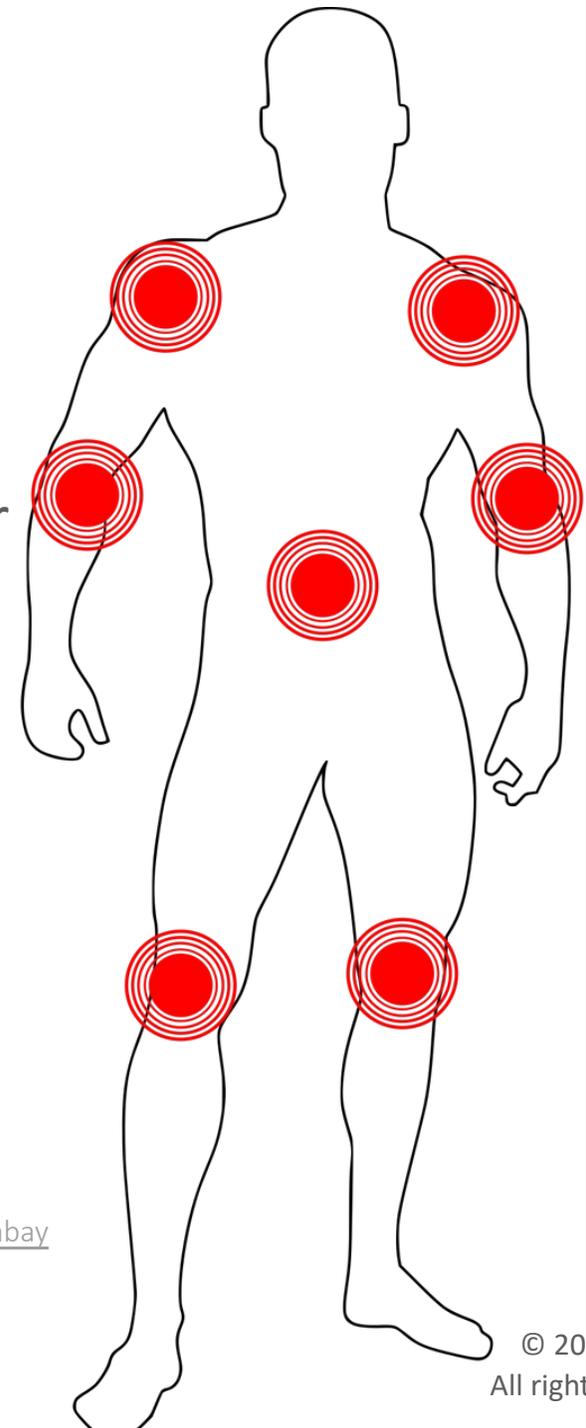
## Risk factors for lawyers

Lawyers suffer from generalized anxiety disorder at rates higher than the general population

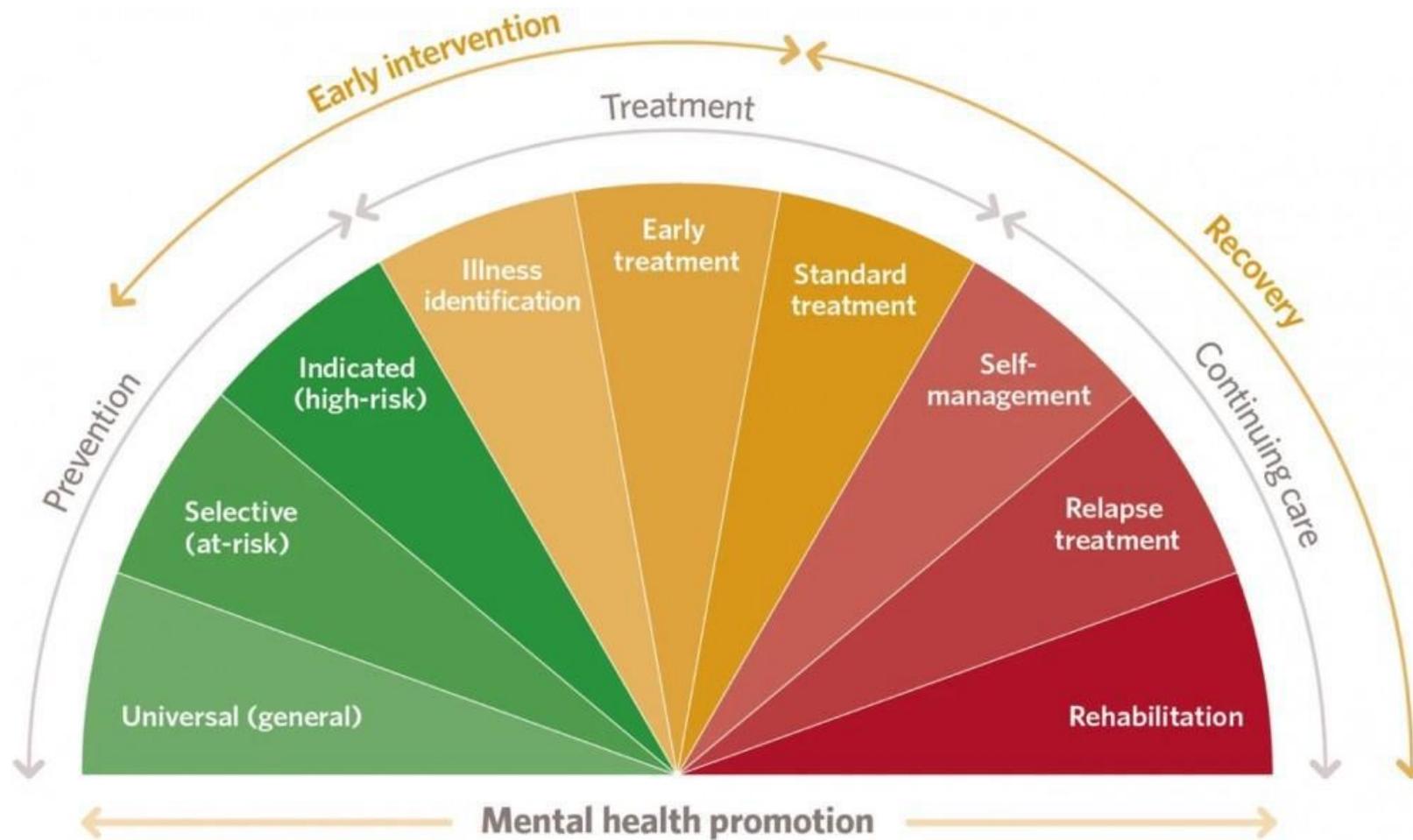
- heavy responsibility
- billable hours
- public speaking
- court appearances
- Negotiations
- difficult cases and clients
- tight deadlines
- interactions with opposing counsel



Sometimes symptoms of a **mental** health disorder appear as **physical** problems, such as stomach pain, back pain, headaches, or other unexplained aches and pains.



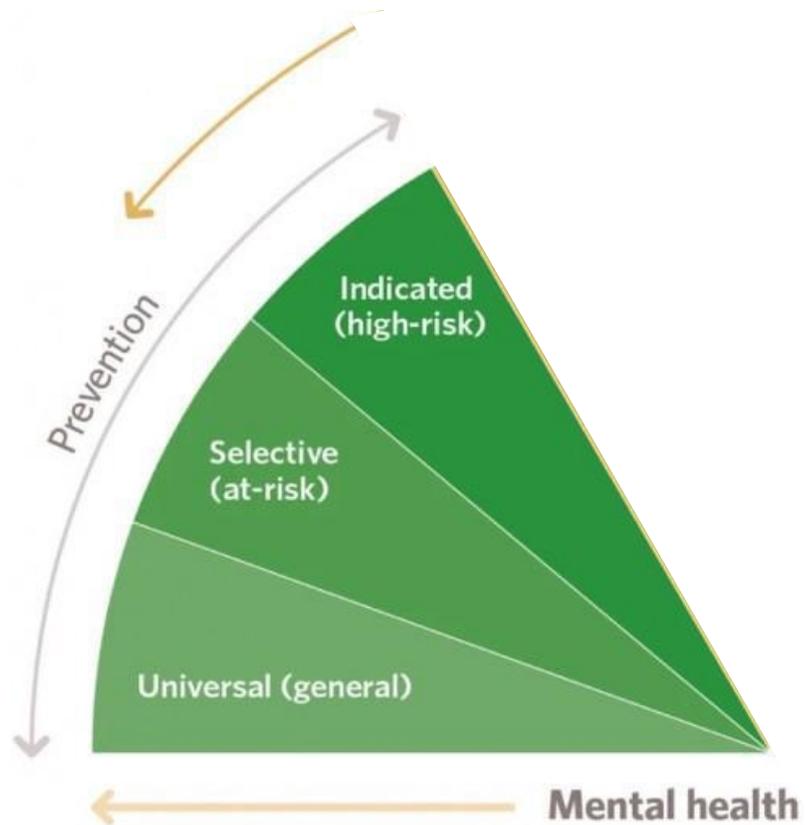
Source: [Mental illness](#) by Mayo Clinic. Images by [Christian Dorn](#) and [mohamed Hassan](#) from [Pixabay](#)



Learning about the **early signs** of mental health issues and **early intervention** can potentially decrease the severity of mental illness. In some cases, it may be possible to **delay** or **prevent** a major mental illness altogether.

Sources: [How To Identify The Early Signs Of Mental Health Issues](#), Vertava Health; [Sports Medicine](#).

# Detection and Prevention



## Pay attention to warning signs.

Work with your doctor or therapist to learn what might trigger your symptoms. Make a plan so that you know what to do if symptoms return. Contact your doctor or therapist if you notice any changes in symptoms or how you feel. Consider involving family members or friends to watch for warning signs.

## Get routine medical care.

Don't neglect checkups or skip visits to your primary care provider, especially if you aren't feeling well. You may have a new health problem that needs to be treated, or you may be experiencing side effects of medication.

## Get help when you need it.

Mental health conditions can be harder to treat if you wait until symptoms get bad. Long-term maintenance treatment also may help prevent a relapse of symptoms.

## Take good care of yourself.

Sufficient sleep, healthy eating and regular physical activity are important. Try to maintain a regular schedule. Talk to your primary care provider if you have trouble sleeping or if you have questions about diet and physical activity.

Source: [Mental illness](#) by Mayo Clinic.



## Connection Between Mental Illness and Addiction

- People diagnosed with mood or anxiety disorders are approximately twice as likely as the general population to suffer from substance abuse.
- Lawyers experience significant mental health issues and substance dependence at higher rates than the general population.

Nat. Inst. on Drug Abuse, [New NIH study shows that certain protective factors do not exist in those with severe mental illness](#) (Jan. 3, 2014), [Practicing Law is a High Risk Profession](#), LAP News to Use (Summer 2005).)

# Types of addictions

## Substance / chemical:

Per Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, text revision,(DSM-5-TR )

- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Cannabis
- Hallucinogens
- Inhalants
- Opioids
- Sedatives
- Hypnotics, or anxiolytics
- Stimulants (including amphetamine-type substances, cocaine, and other stimulants)
- Tobacco

## Behavioral / process:



Source: Bridges of Hope

## Common characteristics

- The excitement or “high” from use or behavior
- Craving the “high”
- Development of tolerance → increased use or repeated behavior
- Psychological and physical withdrawal
- Loss of control

Source: New Choices Treatment Center

## Adverse effects and complications

- Accidents
- Destructive behavior
- Financial problems
- Health problems
- Legal issues
- Relationship issues
- Family conflict
- Work problems
- Suicide

Source: Elizabeth Hartney, BSc, MSc, MA, PhD for VeryWellMind.

# Signs

- Significant weight gain or loss
- Unsteady gait
- Lots of breath mints or mouthwash
- Change in behavior — fast talking, loud talking, loud laughter, extended periods of silence
- Increased irritation
- Repeated unexplained disappearance, often with a sense of urgency
- Lots of excuses for unexplained issues
- Stashes of drugs, often in small plastic, paper, or foil packages
- Secretiveness
- Lying
- Stealing

# Symptoms

- Activities centering on the addiction in a way that negatively affects relationships, school, and work
- A **preoccupation** with the addiction and spending a lot of time on planning, engaging in, and recovering from the addictive behavior
- Difficulty cutting down or controlling the addictive behavior
- Changes in **energy**, e.g. unexpectedly and extremely tired or energetic
- Extreme **mood** changes
- **Physical** changes including increased illness and changes in weight
- **Sleeping** a lot more or less than usual, or at different times of the day or night
- **Tolerance**, which involves the need to engage in the addictive behavior more and more to get the desired effect
- **Withdrawal**, when not taking the substance or engaging in the activity, and they experience unpleasant symptoms

Sources: LINK CHRISTIN, JD, MA, LADC, Executive Director, Legal Professionals Program Caron Treatment Centers; Elizabeth Hartney, BSc, MSc, MA, PhD for VeryWellMind

# Symptoms and complications of specific addictions

## **Behaviors** (gambling, exercise, sex, shopping):

Behavioral addictions are characterized by compulsive behaviors that persist despite negative consequences.

## **Depressants** (alcohol, barbiturates, benzodiazepines):

These medications slow the activity of the central nervous system and can lead to slowed heartbeat and respiration, confusion, coma, and death.

## **Opioids** (painkillers, heroin, morphine):

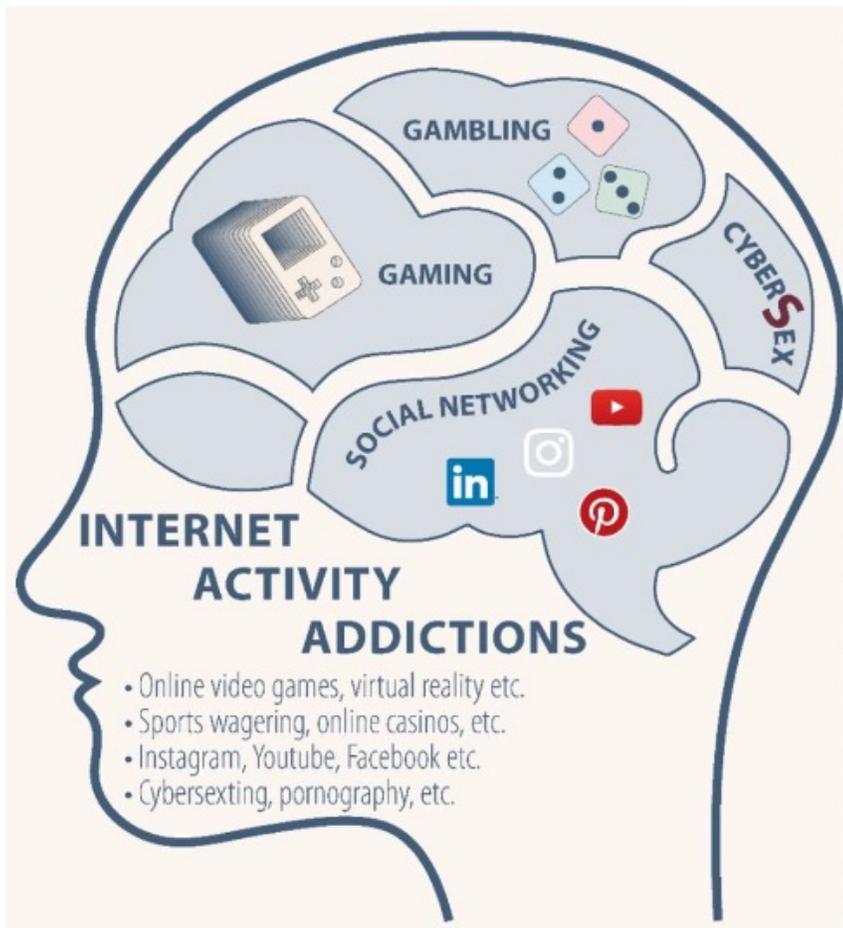
These substances decrease sensitivity to pain and produce strong cravings for opioids.

## **Stimulants** (caffeine, nicotine, amphetamines, methamphetamine, cocaine):

These substances lead to increased energy levels.

Source: Elizabeth Hartney, BSc, MSc, MA, PhD for VeryWellMind.

# Technology addictions



## Americans Cell Phone Usage and Addictive Habits



Source: European Parliament, [Potentially negative effects of internet use](#); Reviews.org

# Signs and symptoms

- Cravings and urges to use digital devices.
- Inability to moderate or abstain from technology or digital mediums.
- Neglecting important life areas such as work, school or relationships.
- Continuing to use digital devices despite it contributing to consequences in your life.
- Using digital devices in dangerous situations such as while driving a car or walking across a city street.
- Losing interest in social and leisure activities that you once enjoyed.
- Using digital devices to induce pleasure or experience gratification.
- Lying or hiding digital usage from family, friends or colleagues as a result of guilt or shame.
- Using digital devices for longer durations than intended or finding yourself using digital devices with increased frequency over time.



Illustration by Liam Francis Walsh

Source: Lin Sternlicht & Aaron Sternlicht for Family Addiction Specialist

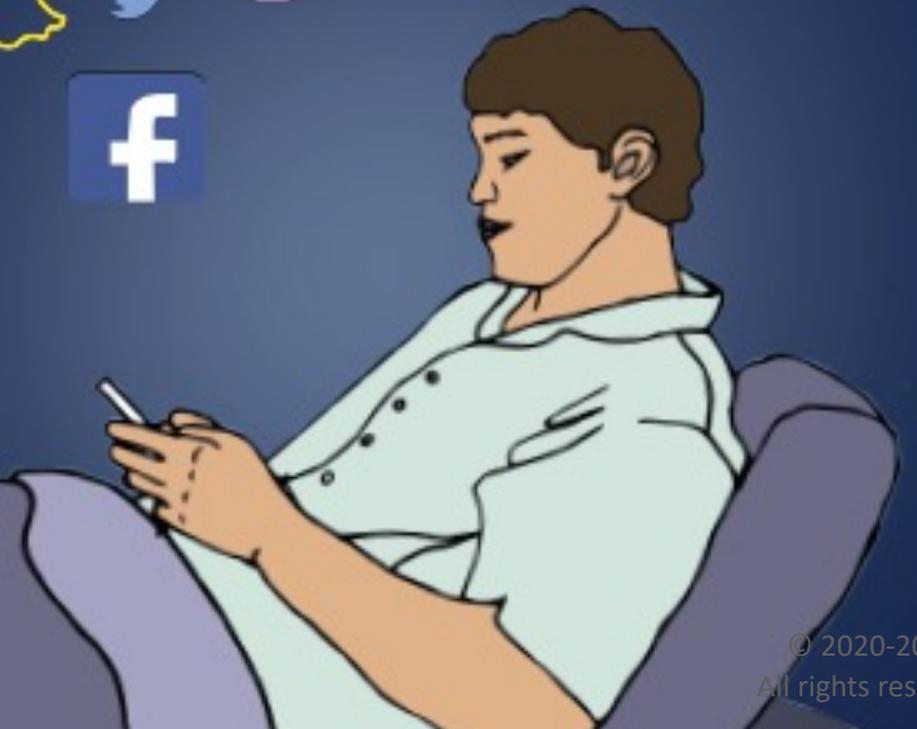
# Effects

## *Physical:*

- Backache
- Headaches
- Weight gain or loss
- Insomnia or disturbances in sleep
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Blurred or strained vision

## *Psychological:*

- Increased stress
- Restlessness, irritability, agitation, and anger
- Euphoric feelings when in front of the computer
- Technology is a breeding ground for Isolation
- Defensiveness, dishonesty, feelings of guilt
- No sense of time; Unable to keep schedules
- Procrastination and avoidance of work
- Exacerbating or contributing to anxiety, depression, ADHD as well as other disorders



Sources: [PsychGuides.com](https://PsychGuides.com); Family Addiction Specialist

# Work addiction

WHEN WORK BECOMES A PERFECTIONIST'S HIGH:

## WORK ADDICTION



Work addiction is common in individuals described as perfectionists because it provides a type of "high" craved by high achievers. Though it may appear at first glance to be a "noble" issue to have, work addiction is actually a mental health condition that may negatively impact an individual's mental and physical health and personal life.



## IDENTIFYING WORK ADDICTION

**1 IN 10 AMERICANS**

are living with work addiction. In other words, 10% of Americans have the compulsive urge to overwork for various reasons, such as to reduce anxiety and to quiet the fear of failure.



Source: University of Nevada, Reno's Master of Social Work Program

## THE EFFECTS OF

# WORK ADDICTION

Contrary to the myth that some types of work addiction are positive, work addiction has many negative effects.

## HOW WORK ADDICTION TAKES ITS TOLL



WORK ADDICTION CAN LEAD TO:

Decreased Productivity

Impaired Judgment

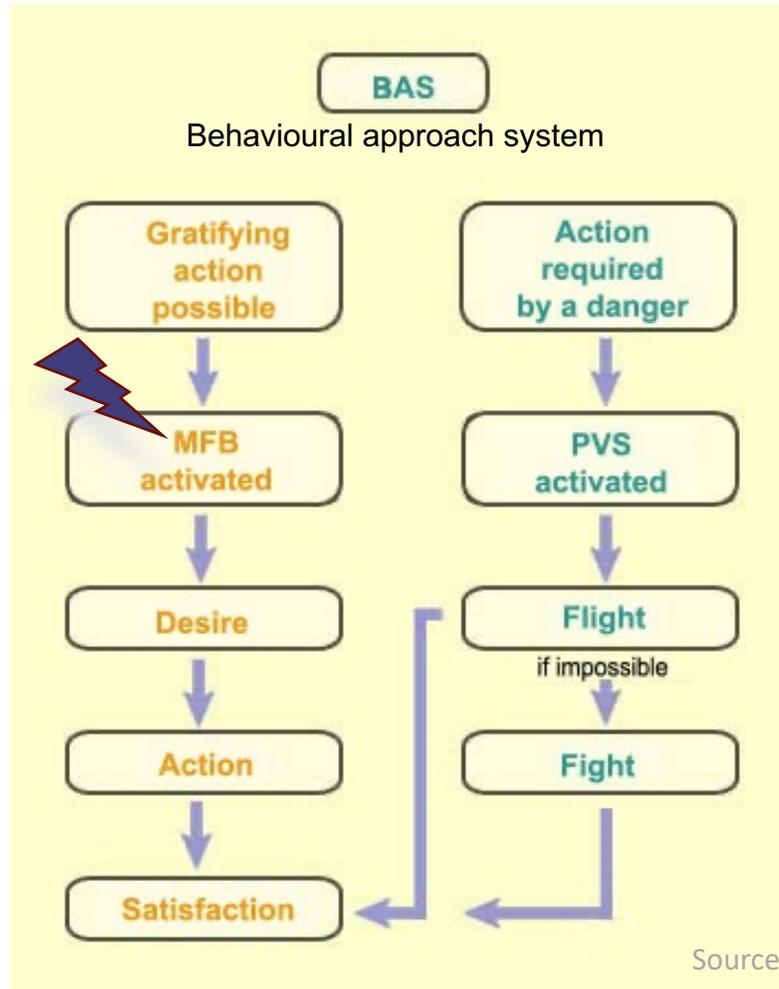
Emotional and Nervous Breakdowns

Burnout

Poor Health

Underlying neurological process -

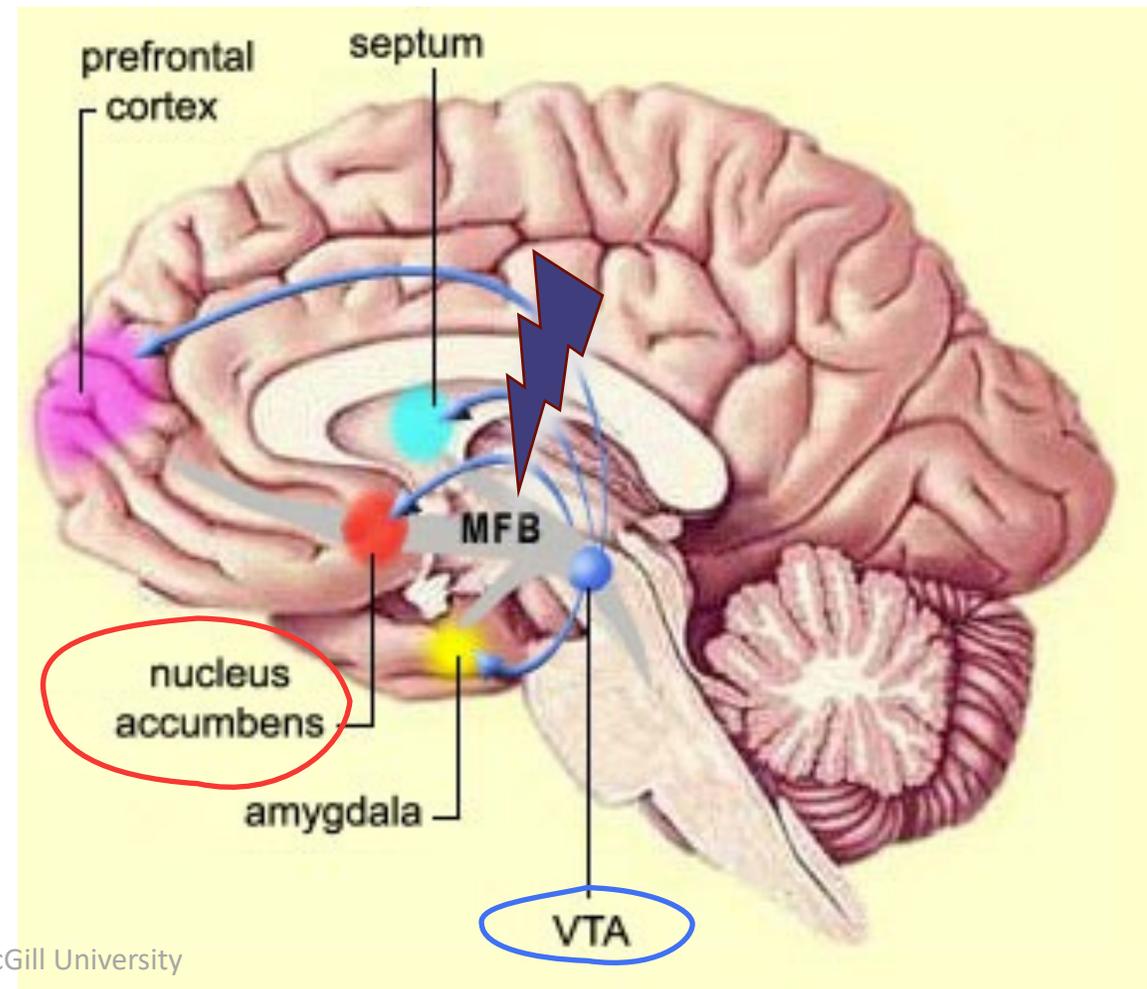
# Pleasure-seeking behavior and reward circuit in the brain



## Brain's main function:

influence behaviors that meet our vital needs -

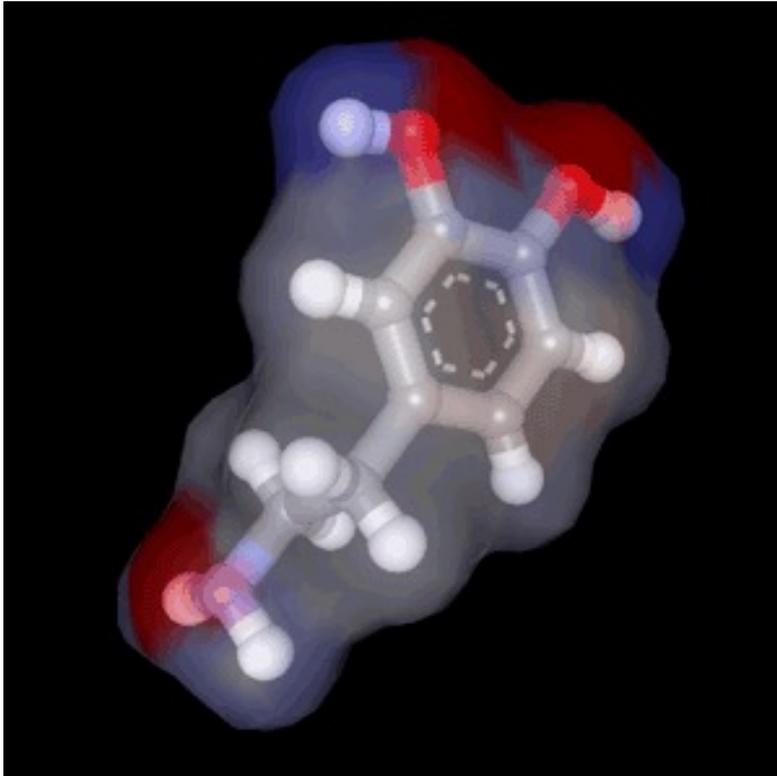
- Eating
- Drinking
- Reproducing
- Protecting ourselves from danger.



Source: The Brain from Top to Bottom, McGill University

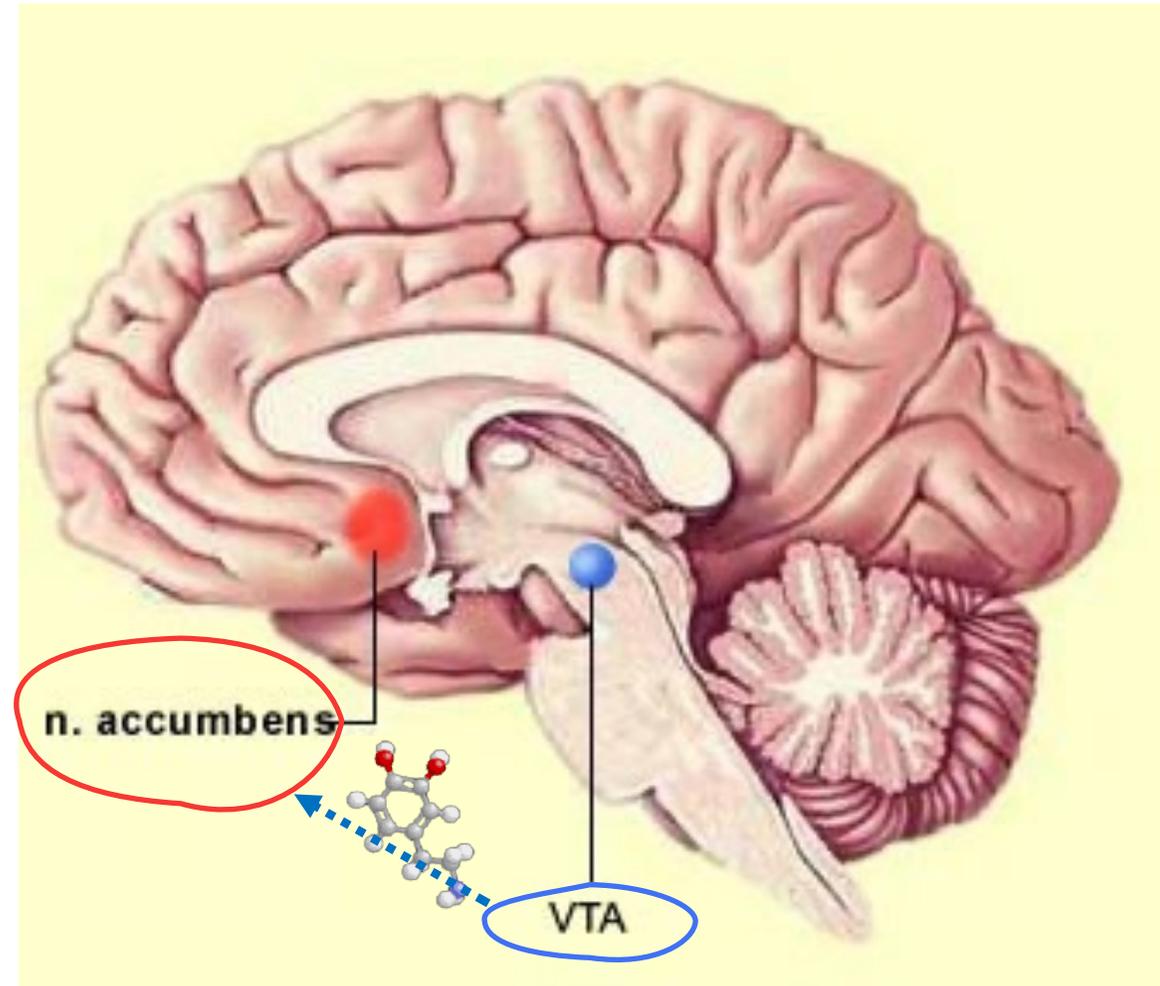
Underlying neurological process -

## Pleasure-seeking behavior and reward circuit in the brain



### Dopamine:

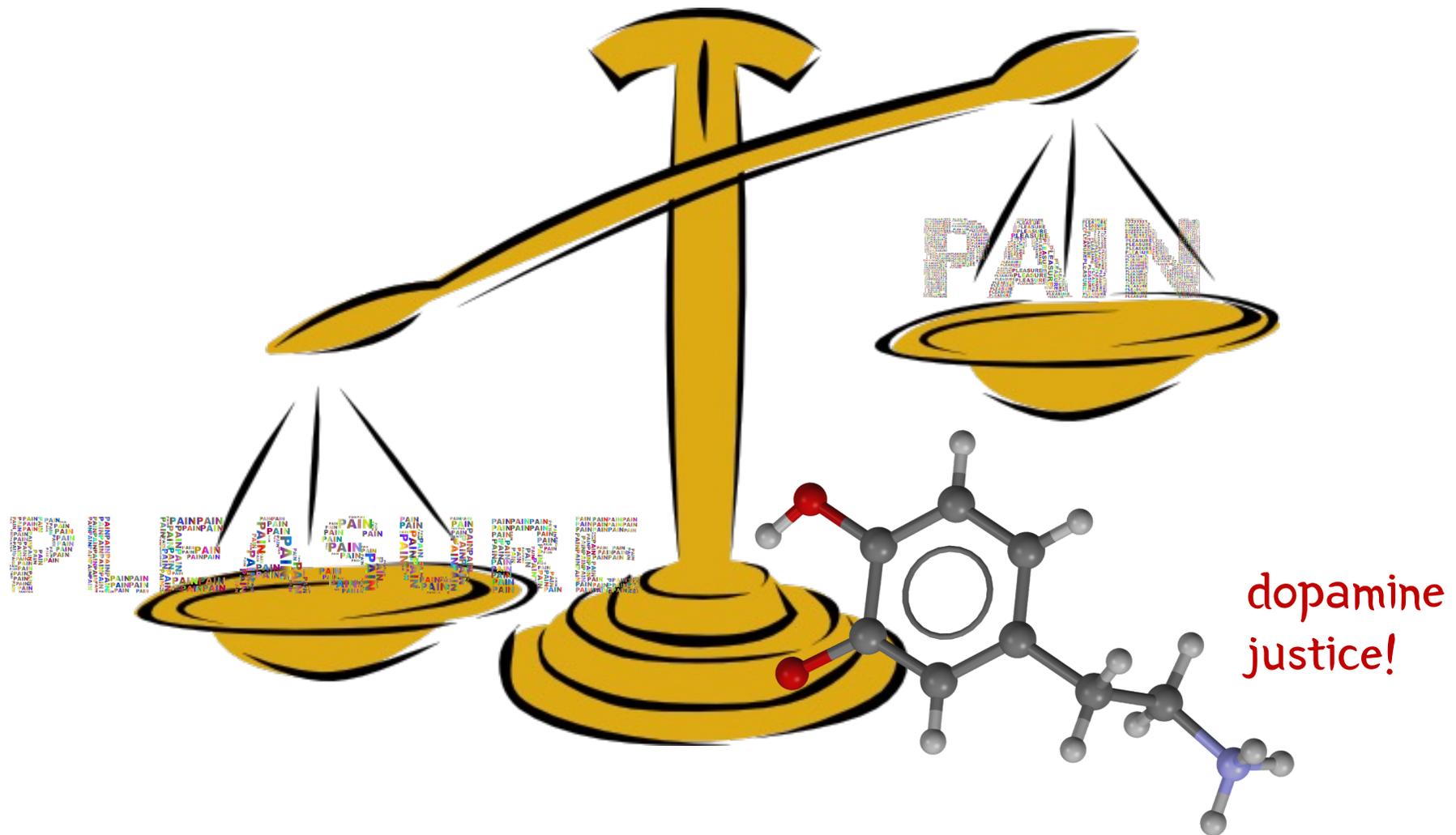
the neurotransmitter playing a central role in positive reinforcement (and dependency)



Source: The Brain from Top to Bottom, McGill University

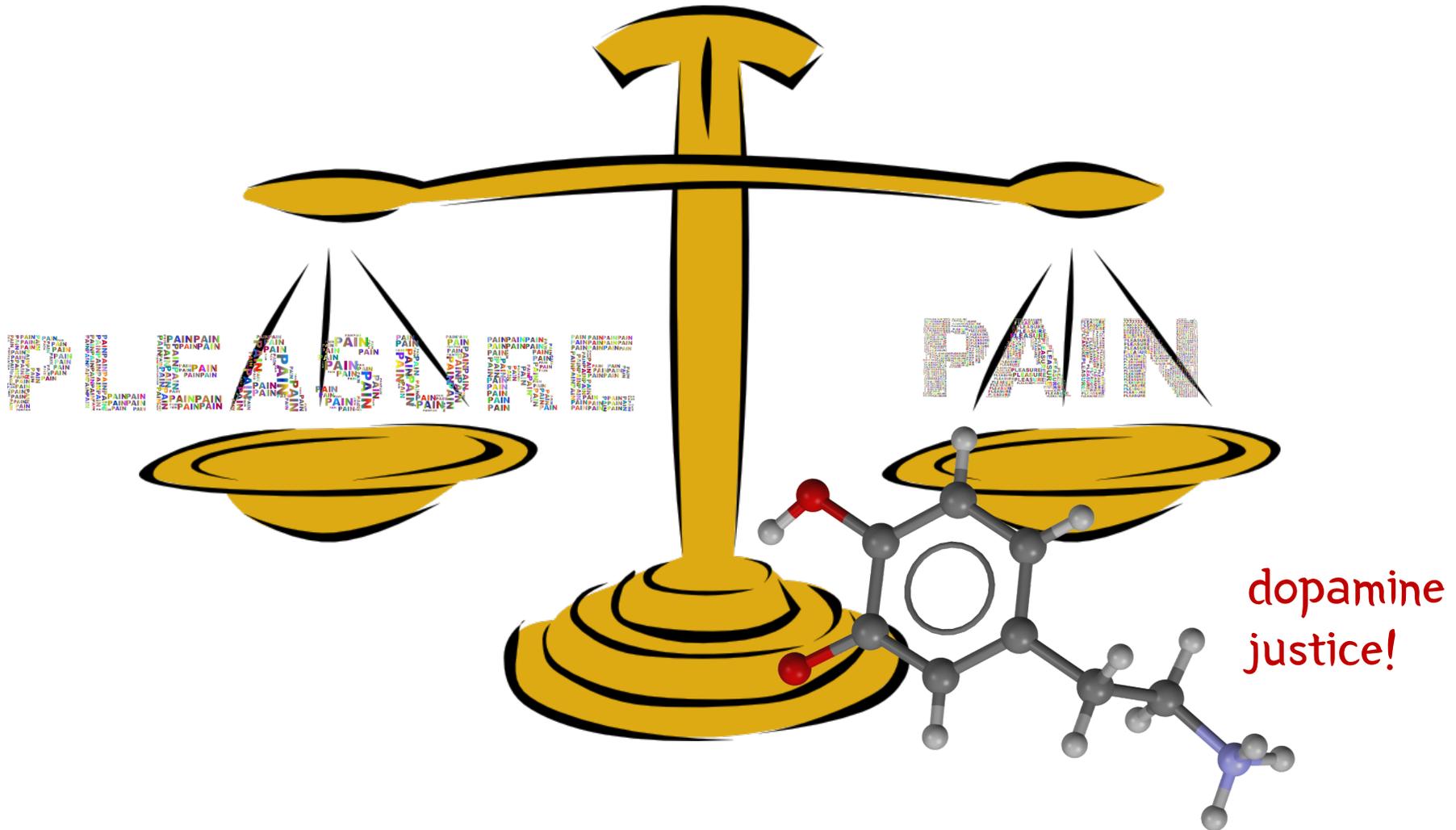
Underlying neurological process -

# Pleasure-pain balance



Underlying neurological process -

# Pleasure-pain balance



Underlying neurological process -

# Pleasure-pain balance

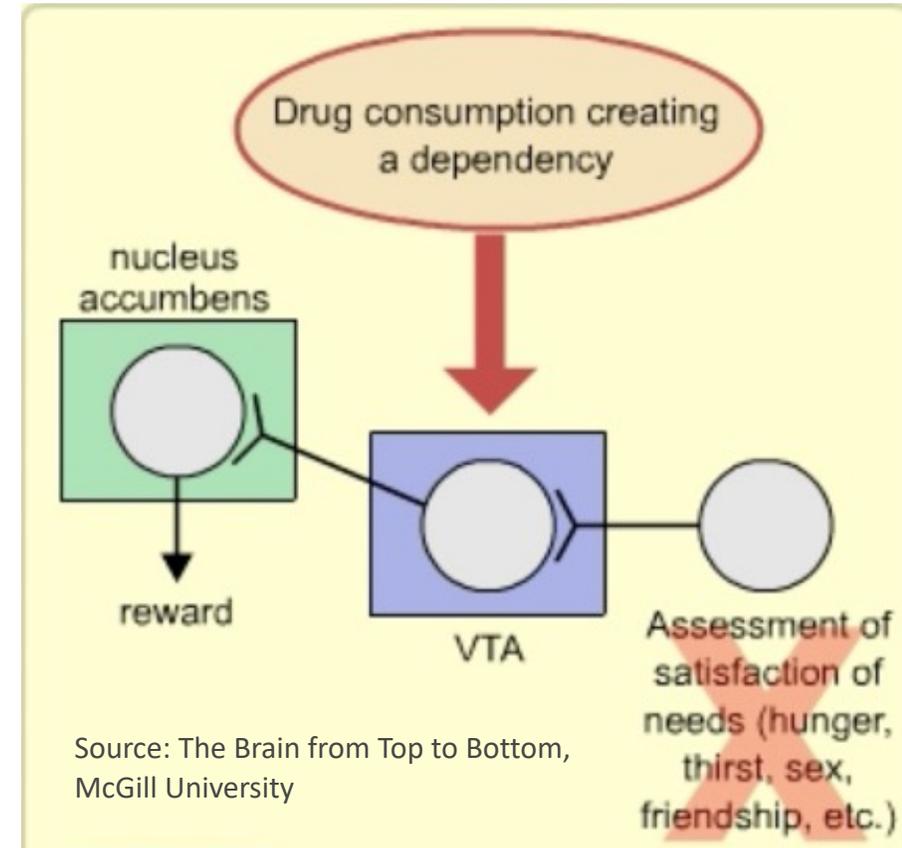


dopamine  
Short-circuit and  
overheating!!!



tolerance  
dependency  
withdrawal

Image by Meredith Miotke for NPR



Source: The Brain from Top to Bottom, McGill University

# Risk factors for addictions

- Genetics
- Personality traits
- Concurrent mental health disorders
- Developmental factors
- Social factors
- Drug characteristics: all drugs are not created equal

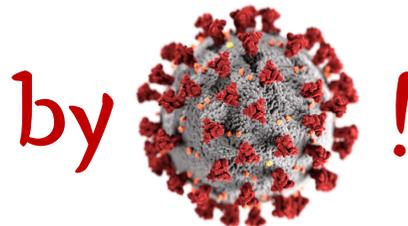
Source: FAR Canada – Families for Addiction Recovery

# and specifically ... for technology addictions

- Neuro-anatomical factors
  - People with drug addiction problems
  - People with psychiatric disorders like anxiety, depression, or ADHD
- Biological factors
  - males
  - adolescents
- Individual factors
  - People with difficulties to relate socially
- Factors associated with the Internet (designed addictiveness!)

Source: The Hospital Clínic de Barcelona

# Exacerbated



Think of every addiction as a different branch of a tree. The trees have roots and the roots -if they find fertile ground- create addictions...

Tackle the “roots” and the “soil”.

There can be recovery, and even growth and wisdom!

## BRANCHES

There are many types of addictions (behaviours, events, experiences, people and substances), depending on the temperament and the culture of the person.



## ROOTS

Different people may have different roots (or combinations of roots) for the same addiction.

## SOIL

The abuse of any kind provides fertile ground for the roots of the tree to develop through addictions.

**THE TREE OF ADDICTIONS**

**upbility**

Publisher of Therapy Resources

Cutting the branches of a tree does not solve the problem. The tree will get new branches. But if we focus on the roots and on the soil, there is hope...

# Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP)

## ANXIETY Self-Assessment Test

Experiencing any of the following?  
Consult the LAP for confidential help.  
877-LAP 4 HELP (877-527-4435)

Have you...

- had at least a six-month period in which you experienced constant, exaggerated, worrisome thoughts and tension about everyday routine life events and activities?
- been trapped in a distressful and time-consuming pattern of unwanted thoughts or compulsive behaviors?
- experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a criminal assault, child abuse, natural or human-caused disasters; after which you have had persistent nightmares, flashbacks, feelings of depression or irritability?
- become distractible or easily startled?
- experienced repeated episodes of intense fear that strike often and without warning? Physical symptoms can include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness or abdominal distress.

Sources: The State Bar of California

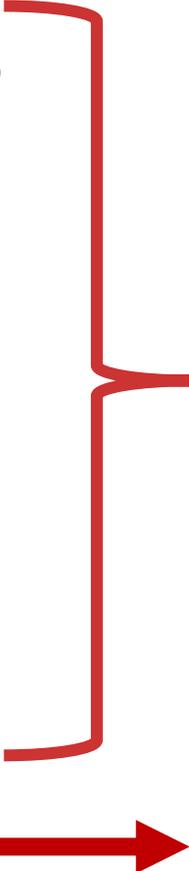
# Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP)

## **DEPRESSION** Self-Assessment Test

*At least a 2-week period of time with either depressed mood, or loss of interest or pleasure*

Are you...

- feeling sad, empty and/or irritable?
- feeling a loss of interest or pleasure in activities or work you once enjoyed?
- experiencing changes in weight and/or appetite?
- having increased difficulty sleeping, or sleeping more than usual?
- experiencing increased restlessness?
- experiencing a decrease in level of activity noticeable to others?
- feeling more fatigued or less energetic?
- having difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions?
- feeling overwhelming guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness?
- thinking of suicide or death?



**Experiencing any of the following? Consult the LAP for confidential help. 877-LAP 4 HELP (877-527-4435)**

Sources: The State Bar of California

**seek help IMMEDIATELY!**

# Alcohol Use Screening (AUDIT)

12 fl oz of regular beer = 8-9 fl oz of malt liquor (shown in a 12 oz glass) = 5 fl oz of table wine = 1.5 fl oz shot of 80-proof spirits ("hard liquor" — whiskey, gin, rum, vodka, tequila, etc.)



about 5% alcohol      about 7% alcohol      about 12% alcohol      about 40% alcohol

The percent of "pure" alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol), varies by beverage.

QUESTIONS	0	1	2	3	4	
1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	Never	Monthly or less	2-4 times a month	2-3 times a week	4 or more times a week	
2. How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day you are drinking?	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7 to 9	10 or more	
3. <b>Women:</b> How often do you have four or more drinks on one occasion?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
<b>Men:</b> How often do you have five or more drinks on one occasion?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
5. How often during the past year have you failed to do what was expected of you because of drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
6. How often during the past year have you needed a drink first thing in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
7. How often during the past year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
8. How often during the past year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because of your drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
9. Have you or someone else been injured because of your drinking?	No		Yes, but not in the past year		Yes, during the past year	
10. Has a relative, friend, doctor, or other health care worker been concerned about your drinking and suggested you cut down?	No		Yes, but not in the past year		Yes, during the past year	

PROVIDER USE ONLY				Total
I	II	III	IV	
0	8	16	20	

# Internet Addiction Test (IAT)

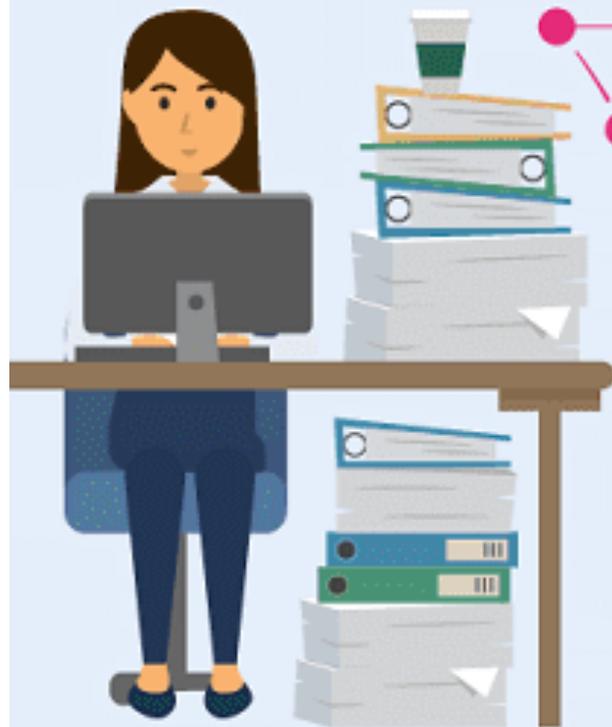
by Dr. Kimberly Young

*Sample questions measuring mild, moderate and severe levels of Internet Addiction, using 0-5 frequency scale.*

		never	rarely	sometimes	often	very often
1	How often do you find that you stay on-line longer than you intended?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2	How often do you neglect household chores to spend more time on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3	How often do your grades or school work suffer because of the amount of time you spend on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4	How often do you become defensive or secretive when anyone asks you what you do on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5	How often do you snap, yell, or act annoyed if someone bothers you while you are on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6	How often do you lose sleep due to being online late at night?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7	How often do you feel preoccupied with the Internet when off-line, or fantasize about being on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8	How often do you find yourself saying "just a few more minutes" when on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9	How often do you try to cut down the amount of time you spend on-line and fail?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10	How often do you try to hide how long you've been on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11	How often do you choose to spend more time on-line over going out with others?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12	How often do you feel depressed, moody, or nervous when you are off-line, which goes away once you are back on-line?	<input type="checkbox"/>				

# IDENTIFYING WORK ADDICTION

To diagnose work addiction, the Bergen Work Addiction Scale requires rating the following items on a scale of never, rarely, sometimes, often or always:



You have ignored requests to reduce the time you spend working.

You work to avoid feeling guilty, helpless, depressed or anxious.

You think of what you can do to free up more time for work.

You've allowed work to negatively impact your health.

You end up working more than you initially intended.

You feel stressed when you aren't able to work.

You don't consider time spent on hobbies, fun activities or fitness as important as time spent working.

**An individual with work addiction rates at least four of the items as "often" or "always."**

# More tests and other resources

## [Psychological tests](#)

(for self-education only. Contact a licensed mental health professional for accurate diagnosis)

### **About mental health:**

- [Mental illness \(Mayo Clinic\)](#)
- [Mental Health Conditions \(Mental Health America\)](#)

### **About addiction:**

- [Process Addictions \(Kansas Lawyer Assistance Program\)](#)
- [This Is Your Brain On . . . New science tells us how to better manage our addictions.](#)
- [Addiction to the Internet](#)
- [Computer/Internet Addiction Symptoms, Causes and Effects](#)
- [The Impact of Work Addiction on Family Life and Mental Health](#)
- [The addiction no one wants to talk about](#)

# Getting help

Recognition and desire to want help is critical first step!

- Lawyer Assistance Program
- Your doctor or mental health professional



## Treatment options:

- Residential
- Outpatient
- Day treatment/partial hospitalization
- Sober living communities

## Therapeutic modalities:

- Motivational-enhancement therapy (MET)
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Medication
- Exercise and active recovery coaching

## Support groups:

- In-person or online options.
- Adequate [social support](#) essential to addiction recovery. Reach out to trusted friends and family.

Source: Elizabeth Hartney, BSc, MSc, MA, PhD for VeryWellMind.

What we  
learned today:

self-assessment tests  
**reward circuit**  
dopamine early detection and prevention  
neurochemical processes  
mental health impact  
**mental health disorders**  
**pleasure-pain balance**  
**behavioral addictions**  
**substance addictions**  
help resources

## Your reflection:

How would you assess the state of your mental health?

What from the learnings today touched you the most?

How do you now see addiction differently?

What actions would you take?

## Your questions?

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**Wishing you a healthy and happy  
professional life!**



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