

Hear it from Dr Rod



How do you know if you have an addiction problem?

By Raul J. Rodriguez MD, DABPN, ASAM, MRO

The New Year is a great opportunity to initiate change and self-improvement. Fitness is a common New Year's resolution, but so is seeking help for addiction. So how do you know if you have a problem that warrants help? The answer to this may be simpler than you realize.

From the very simplest perspective, if you have been thinking that you have a problem then you most likely do. Never underestimate your instincts. Many of us can sense that something is wrong long before we develop a better understanding for what exactly is happening. This may be your first clue, so try not to ignore it. With addiction though, you may not be the first one to notice that you have a problem.

Our families and friends that know and love us are incredibly observant of our behavior. They are often the first to notice that something is wrong. They rarely will tell you right away though. They will struggle with wanting to make sure that they're right first, often followed by the common stages of grief, which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. They must then build up the courage to confront you about it, which could take months to years. So if a loved one actually tells you that they think you have a problem, there is likely much more behind what's being said than you may realize. This is a major indicator that you may have an addiction and have been showing signs of it for a while.

So what are the signs of addiction that you should be looking for? Start with making a list of the chemicals (ie. Medication, Illegal Drugs, Alcohol, etc) that you are using. The longer the list is, the more likely that you already have a problem or will shortly. How often are you using these substances? The more often, the likely



worse it is. Do you use more now than before? This shows your body developing tolerance. Do you "have to" use these substances to try and feel normal? That is called, dependence. Do you find yourself getting into trouble from your usage? Do you find that you keep using drugs and alcohol, even after you keep experiencing major problems from using them? That is the very definition of addiction and is the primary basis for making the diagnosis. At this point help must be sought to avoid escalating consequences.

Seeking help for addiction is much easier now. Medical advancements have made outpatient detox and treatment safe, very effective, widely available and affordable. Look for licensed physicians and professionals that specialize in addic-

tion. Physicians should be board certified in Psychiatry, ASAM (American Society of Addiction Medicine) certified, or ABAM (American Board of Addiction Medicine) certified. Be wary of greatly discounted detox programs and pain management centers altogether. These programs are usually poorly structured and have a very high rate of treatment failure. Speak to someone at the facility. You should feel comfortable about it before even setting a foot in there. ●

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