

# What is the Difference Between Addiction and Dependence?

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Conversations about substance abuse often involve the terms dependence and addiction. It is not uncommon for these terms to be used interchangeably. The concepts are similar, but there are subtle yet critical differences between dependence and addiction.

## What is Addiction?

Addiction is often referred to in clinical terms as a substance use disorder. Despite harmful and potentially dangerous consequences, it is a strong compulsion to get and use substances. Drug addiction is a mental health condition that changes how the brain functions. Using various substances, including illicit drugs, prescription medications, and even some (legal) over-the-counter medications, can result in addiction.

How society views and defines addiction continues to evolve. The definition of addiction varies (sometimes significantly) between individuals, organizations, the medical community, and society in general. It is a complex illness that affects various parts of the brain and body. Addiction is responsible for disruptions of regions within the brain responsible for reward, judgment, learning, memory, and motivation. As a result, people who chronically abuse substances may not be entirely aware of their impact on their body and its functioning.

Addiction is also considered a chronic relapsing disease. The disease of addiction is marked by periods of recovery and relapse, as is the case with many other disease processes that may affect the human body. Consequently, it mimics illnesses such as hypertension and type-2 diabetes. Addiction is a lifelong illness that requires ongoing effort and a commitment to sobriety to manage. However, with support and treatment, it is possible to significantly reduce the impact of addiction on your physical and emotional health.

Grand Falls Recovery is a Missouri rehab center that offers inpatient treatment and detox programs in Joplin, MO.

## What is Drug Dependence?

The term dependence is used to describe when your body and central nervous system (brain) have become accustomed to having a certain amount of a particular substance present in your system. When someone is dependent on drugs and tries to quit, they will usually experience side effects connected to their substance of choice. These side effects are also known as withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms are signals from your brain and body indicating the levels of your substance of choice are low, and you need to use again soon to return things to the new "normal" your system desires.

When people talk about dependence, they often combine the symptoms of physical and psychological dependence into one. Physical and psychological dependence are often discussed as though they are the same, but the two concepts indeed differ. Although it is difficult to point to a symptom of dependency and determine it to be purely psychological or entirely physical, there are specific symptoms that are reflective of one over the other.

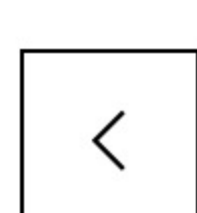
Dependency on some substances produces more physical symptoms, whereas others may have more psychological symptoms. Physical dependence is all about how the body reacts when you use or try to stop using. When you are dependent on drugs, cravings can be overpowering. In time, vital body systems struggle to function without the drug. Painful withdrawal symptoms generally occur when you develop a physical dependency and stop using.

Psychological dependence is the collection of addictive behaviors common to addiction. Psychological dependence explains the mental health challenges linked to developing and recovering from drug addiction. Understanding psychological dependence helps you understand the emotions accompanying drug use and recovery.

## What is the Difference Between Addiction and Dependence?

Understanding the crucial (yet subtle) difference between dependence and addiction is essential to helping you or a loved one receive the best and most comprehensive treatment to help overcome drug addiction. Drug dependence can and often does lead to addiction. However, it is possible to depend on a substance and not become addicted. The symptoms of dependency and addiction overlap considerably. Therefore, a significant gray area and sometimes confusion is associated with identifying whether a condition is a dependence or addiction.

Suppose one is looking to separate the terms. In that case, the best way is to think of addiction as the combination of both physical and psychological dependence on drugs or alcohol (or another behavior or object). When individuals have developed an addiction, they exhibit an ongoing psychological need for a specific and the physical effects of dependence on that substance. When the addictive substance is not supplied, the individual someone with a physical or psychological dependence will experience withdrawal symptoms. Dependency and addiction are disease processes that, if left untreated, will worsen with time. Overcoming a substance use disorder can be a complex and challenging process. At Grand Falls Recovery, we are here to help. [Contact us today](#) to learn more about our Missouri drug addiction treatment programs.



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