

# Renaissance Recovery Blog

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[renaissancerecoverycenter.com/does-addiction-last-a-lifetime](https://renaissancerecoverycenter.com/does-addiction-last-a-lifetime)

## Does Addiction Last a Lifetime?

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Many people who look back on their period(s) of alcohol or drug abuse years or decades later discover that their substance addiction recovery has not really fit into the traditional model. The lifelong patterns indicating an “addictive personality type” have not characterized their recovery experience. The ongoing substitution of one addiction for another, albeit perhaps a constructive one, has not happened. On the contrary, often people find themselves thriving and satisfied with life beyond addiction. But, what are the most common recovery outcomes across the population of people who have gone through addiction treatment?

## **Is the “Addictive Personality” Fact or Fiction?**

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The question of whether starting occasional use of alcohol and/or recreational drugs many years after cocaine or heroin treatment is likely to lead to, or to be the initial sign of relapse is controversial. Is it really possible that a person leaving addiction treatment at age 20 can enjoy a casual drink or two at age 50, without ending up in rehab again?

There is a camp of the opinion that drug addiction is life-long. Members of that camp are convinced that addiction never ends. They believe it can only be managed through diligence. Those people would say that the fifty-year-old has thrown away 30 years of success. They believe that to tempt fate by ever again dabbling in any form of substance use is a dangerous breach of the critical discipline that prevents spiraling downward into a dissolute life.

People in the opposing camp believe that not all individuals struggling to overcome drug addiction necessarily have “addictive personalities.” They do not accept the conception of addiction that assesses individuals in substance abuse treatment as being simply naturally driven to replace former addictions with new ones. In fact, despite all therapeutic efforts to persuade them that adherence to life-long abstinence is their only hope, many people have chosen a less austere way of life beyond addiction.

## **What do Average Addiction Treatment Programs Teach?**

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Except in more modern drug and alcohol rehab programs, traditional indoctrination into a lifestyle of permanent abstinence prevails across the addiction treatment subsector of the healthcare industry. Rehab participants in short-term (90-day) treatment and those in longer-term rehab alike find that the core message intensively impressed upon them is that they have addictive personalities.

They are assured in therapy that the addiction they have experienced up to the point of receiving treatment can be expected to be replaced by some other form of addiction. If the next addiction is overcome, then another will take its place, and so on perpetually. Across the spectrum of therapies in any but the more advanced drug and alcohol treatment centers, participants are taught that if a person ever becomes addicted to a substance of any kind, then his or her only possibility for a normal life is in pure abstinence.

Without close examination, the rationale for this position seems plausible: A person’s natural predispositions to addiction, such as genetics, diagnosed depression or anxiety, traumas, and/or others, could cause them to become addicted to something else, after they have done the work to overcome heroin addiction.

## **What Does Science Reveal About Addictive Personality Theory?**

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Medically, the question is whether or not diverse addictions can utilize a common ultimate pathway in a person’s mesolimbic dopamine system (the brain’s neurological reward center). In the event that one path is inaccessible, can the body simply identify an alternate route along which to satiate ravenous neurotransmitters, thereby seizing onto a cross-addiction?

That remains a controversial question. However, understanding of effective drug addiction treatment and recovery maintenance has evolved significantly during the past 100 years since the formation of the traditional model. For example, an old, outmoded adage still being instilled in treatment participants in some rehab facilities is that all recreational drugs are equally to be rejected, i.e., the notion that “a drug is a drug.”

The above position has proven to be devoid of scientific support. It fails to distinguish between dangerous opiates like the often deadly fentanyl and highly useful therapeutic drugs like Suboxone (buprenorphine), now broadly used in drug addiction treatment.

Proponents of updated addiction treatment methodologies grant that the traditional conception of substance addiction and recovery maintenance represented the best approach back in the 1930s. That was the era of the inception of AA. But, they find that abstinence-based recovery and relapse prevention programs patterned on the AA model have held onto processes that are based on tradition, not necessarily on science. And, they cite ever-growing numbers of people who have not subscribed to the traditional theory throughout their long-term recovery maintenance.

They contend that modern neurochemistry along with MRI technologies may dispense with the old model sooner than later. In the meantime, they do continue to recognize the benefits of mutual support group therapies for addiction treatment. They also acknowledge the value of such therapeutic support for many people throughout recovery maintenance.

## **Good News About Inclinations to New Addictions**

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The abstinence-only relapse prevention model has persisted since the early days of growth across the addiction recovery industry nearly a century ago. But, from more recent examination of outcomes in today's more progressive drug addiction treatment processes, the old paradigm may be aging out. What all do agree on is that substance addiction recovery is a resilience-building process. But, for now, it still appears that no one knows the definitive answer to the question of whether people perpetually substitute addictions.

A 2014 research study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) and the NCBI concluded that “Compared with those who do not recover from a SUD [substance abuse disorder], people who recover have less than half the risk of developing a new SUD. Contrary to clinical lore, achieving remission does not typically lead to drug substitution, but rather is associated with a lower risk of new SUD onset.”

The researchers went on to suggest in their report that “coping strategies, skills, and motivation of individuals who recover from a SUD may protect them from the onset of a new SUD.” On interpretation, people who do the work to overcome substance addiction, come away much better prepared to respond to challenges and manage stress in healthier ways.

Through the addiction treatment process, people develop tools to help them connect with people, reach out for help, and recognize and accept their own and others' ego issues. They become much better equipped to handle stressful situations in constructive ways, perhaps by relaxing, exercising, seeking advice, etc.

Through this kind of addiction recovery process, people grow away from easily being triggered to use a substance to escape challenging situations. They substitute substance use with the kinds of healthier and more satisfying activities that make a good life — which activities are not definable as merely replacement addictions.

Still, the abstinence-only relapse prevention model has persisted since the early days of drug addiction treatment nearly a century ago. But, based on the research published by the JAMA, and on reported long-term outcomes after therapies at more progressive addiction treatment facilities, the old paradigm may be aging out at last.

## **Why Choose Addiction Treatment with Renaissance Recovery Center?**

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Our addiction recovery specialists have extensive experience in treating substance addiction and underlying causes, including potential mental health issues. Renaissance addiction recovery therapists work with each client in his or her customized one-on-one outpatient treatment program, tailored to meet his/her individual needs. We focus on underlying issues that lead to substance abuse and addiction. Without overcoming the cause, people relapse.

Our addiction treatment counselors help our clients to get rid of the sense of shame, and pain, and self-isolation that are common among people who struggle with substance addiction. We're here to help you make your way to a new, more meaningful life beyond addiction. Our addiction recovery programs emphasize cultivating mindfulness, proactive personal problem-solving, and social support, in a comfortable outpatient setting.

## **Renaissance Recovery Center, Gilbert AZ**

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We are outpatient alcohol and drug rehab center located in Gilbert, Arizona. Renaissance addiction treatment is affordable. We accept most insurance, and we can confirm your benefits for you, to ensure you have insurance coverage for your treatment program.

For more information about drug and alcohol addiction treatment at Renaissance Recovery Center, Gilbert AZ, or to schedule an appointment for a consultation, call (480) 725-8367, or use our online contact option.