



Do I Have an Addiction?

*By Arden McGregor & Chris Papastamos,
Brainworks*

Sometimes the most difficult part of having a problem is recognizing there is one.

Chances are, when you hear the word “ADDICT”, strong mental images come to mind. No matter what those images are, one thing is likely: The pictures in our minds likely look nothing like who we are.

The brain is so powerful, that it can define problems in such a way that no matter how big our problem gets--we never fit the profile our mind has created! Our brain can make excuses, rationalize, and tell us lies. These are collectively referred to as “denial”.

The truth is that individuals with addictions look just like you and me. They come from all walks of life. They are guys and girls; university professors and high school dropouts; they are able bodied and - yes - they may also have brain injuries. In fact, more than half of individuals who sustain brain injuries develop substance abuse problems. (Miller, 1995)

Recognizing that a problem exists can be the hardest part of the entire rehabilitation process. This can be especially true for people who have experienced a brain injury. Decreased awareness is a common neurological affect of brain injury. Other cognitive changes such as memory impairments and loss of ability to see things from other viewpoints can also make it even more difficult to recognize an addiction.

So how can I tell if I have an addiction? Here are some questions to consider: Has anyone expressed concern over my drinking, drug use or some other behaviour such as gambling or working too much? Am I engaging in a behaviour secretly, knowing others would be upset at me, or that I would be embarrassed if they knew? Do I ignore risks associated with my behaviour, such as health consequences, financial repercussions, or relationship problems with family members or friends? Have I tried to stop and failed?

The **CAGE** Questionnaire (Ewing, 1984) is one of the most frequently used screening tools for alcohol addiction. (There are similar screening tools for other types of addictions and we're happy to share if you email us!).

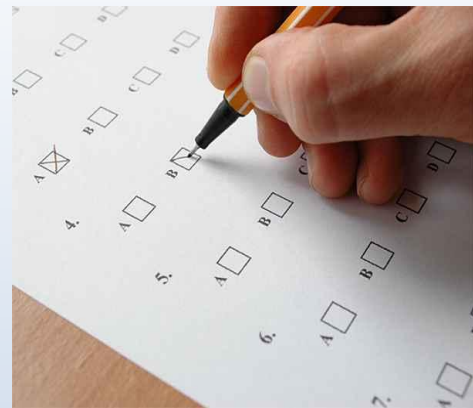
C - Have you ever felt you ought to Cut down on your drinking?

A - Have people Annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?

G - Have you ever felt bad or Guilty about your drinking?

E - Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (Eye-opener) to stop your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

If you said “yes” to even one of these questions, further evaluation is recommended. Saying “yes” to two or more of these questions is a strong indication that there is a problem. Call your family doctor or psychology professional. Don't try to diagnose the problem yourself. If you do have an addiction, it is likely that your brain will ‘fool’ you into believing everything is alright.



Chris Papastamos, Brainworks' Rehabilitation Therapist, has a Master of Arts degree in Counselling and 15 years of counselling experience, with a decade of it being spent in the addictions field. Arden McGregor is a member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario and the Executive Director of Brainworks. Her clinical experience includes seventeen years in the field of brain injury rehabilitation.

References and more information available by contacting info@brainworksrehab.com.