

# Drug Abuse

By Michelle Brait

*At the age of 16, Elizabeth Mayo tried her first drug. She did it to be cool and to prove to the older kids at school that she was “mature”. At first it was just a simple act to “get in with the cool crowd”, but eventually it became a path she had trouble turning away from. She began using drugs every day; she thought that the older kids would only stay friends with her if she did. With that, she would skip class, lie to her friends and family, and engage in scandalous behavior just to get her hands on drugs. As she continued, she craved the drugs more and more every day; she found herself lost without it. Eventually, her friends and family found out what she had been doing. However, when they realized the entirety of the situation, rather than supporting her, they kicked her out of the house and terminated their friendship. With nobody to help her, she could not stop abusing drugs. She was living out of her car, did not complete high school, could not find a job, had no friends, struggled financially, and was tarnishing her health each and every day. She found herself in a downward spiral and she lost control. Today, although she is trying to get herself back on track, she has still not spoken to any of her sisters since that day she was exiled from her family. It took her almost 40 years to begin turning her life around, however she now realizes that she lost the people in her life that were most important to her to drugs.*

Drug abuse is a major problem in the United States that affects many people. In fact, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service’s Administration, in 2013, 4.2 million Americans were dependent on

marijuana, 17.3 million abused alcohol, 1.9 million were dependent on pain relievers, and 855,000 abused cocaine.

Drug addiction is a chronic brain disease that causes a person to compulsively seek drugs, despite the harmful consequences. The person becomes dependent on one or more drugs, leading them to crave the drug or drugs. This compulsiveness is a result of abnormalities in the brain caused by drugs.

The brain sends and receives information to and from the body in the form of neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters are responsible for processes such as movement, emotions, motivation, and pleasure. Drugs overstimulate these processes, creating euphoric effects. After continuously using a drug, a person can become addicted to the euphoria that follows the drug intake. If used enough, the brain will also adapt to the intake of the drug, thus increasing the threshold needed to obtain the rewards of the neurotransmitters. This adaptation leads to drug abuse, as the person will eventually lack feelings such as pleasure or motivation without the drugs; the person will only receive the reward with the drug or drugs. This abuse and addiction can eventually lead to very dangerous behaviors, the loss of friendships and careers, and damages to the brain and health.

In terms of sacrificing several aspects of an individual's life, drug abuse can cause a person who suffers from drug abuse to tarnish relationships. Whether it is isolating oneself, or other people creating distance from the person, drug abuse can negatively impact relationships. In addition to harming relationships, drug abuse can harm one's career. Drug abuse increases the chance of a person losing his or her job, or failing school.

This is due to the fact that drugs take over someone's life, leaving priorities such as work or school behind. Finally, drug abuse increases a person's risk for health issues. Such health issues include cancer, cardiovascular disease, stroke, HIV/AIDS, lung disease, and mental disorders. These disorders not only increase one's risk for death, but also potentially put other's in harms way.

While this disease is scary, it is preventable and treatable. Like Elizabeth, who is on the road to recovery, it is possible to overcome this disease. To support or prevent someone from suffering from this disease, he or she should get involved in prevention or treatment programs. These programs often discuss topics such as friends, family, the community, the media, and ways to begin overcoming the disease. In addition to these programs, education is key to prevention or treatment. If people are educated on the effects of drug abuse, they will be less likely to engage in drugs. Finally, to prevent or support someone battling this disease, stand by him or her; support is an integral factor in beating this disease. Drug abuse is a disease impacting the safety of the community, however, through hard work, dedication, and education, people can live happier and healthier lives, and the world can become a safer place.