



What's your addiction? (yes, it's YOU we're talking to!)

The bad news? We all have at least one addiction, says author ARIANE DE BONVOISIN. The good news? It really is possible to ditch it. Read on!

It's often easier to spot someone else's harmful addiction than your own, but work yours out and you can beat it!

ALICE KNOWS EVERYTHING. When she gets together with friends or family she's always the one who dominates, interrupts and has the last word. She thinks she's simply confident. But, really, she's developed an addiction to being in control. It helps her feel good about herself.

Grateful you're not an addict like Alice? Well, think again! We're *all* addicted to at least one thing. It's often easy to spot an addiction in friends, family or colleagues, but not so easy to see in ourselves: our go-to addiction tends to sit in our blind spot.

Often we don't realise our little issue exists because it's not the classic case of drugs, alcohol, gambling or porn. However, almost anything can become an addiction. Let's kick off with the easily recognisable ones, such as the craving for sugar. Eight times more addictive than cocaine, sugar is now thought to be the greatest global addiction, with the average person consuming more than 1kg a week, often without realising it! Equally obvious is heavy reliance upon coffee, botox, TV, shopping, over-working, hair-pulling or being glued to a cell phone or the internet

(which now even has its own name: Internet Addiction Disorder).

But some of the worst addictions are less obvious – especially those of the mind. Consider the following: needing to be in control like Alice, imagining the worst, trying to change others, getting fulfilment from 'stuff' and chasing power, becoming obsessed with your children, settling for crumbs of love in toxic relationships, disapproving of yourself, being down and depressed to get attention, and not sharing your feelings (or anything about you) in order to protect yourself...

controlling

'Don't exaggerate,' you cry! 'I'm functioning, aren't I? Why should I change?' Good question. So when does a harmless habit become a harmful addiction? Here's an easy definition: *an addiction is the continued repetition of a behaviour despite adverse consequences.*

With a habit, you're in control of your choices, with an addiction you're not. So while you know your friend/relative actually makes a great effort to stay in touch and spend time with you, you just can't help dropping those

self-pitying comments about being lonely that tug at his/her guilt strings and, ironically, ruin many a visit or phone call.

And you know you should put down that cell phone and chat to your loved one(s), but you crave the rush that comes with checking for a reply to your latest SMS or Facebook post. Relationships might be harmed by this behaviour but hey, that's just life, isn't it? Well, not really. But it's the ultimate trick of the mind to make us think it's not that bad, and to keep us in our rut without realising the consequences of our addiction.

What makes us addicts in the first place? Circumstantial factors can contribute to addiction. If our parents are/were addicts or unhealthy in some way, we probably never learned healthy tools to deal with life. Instead, we medicated on whatever was available to us: sugar, TV, video games. This usually continues into our adult lives and we just add to the list: overworking, smoking, drinking. I personally believe that spiritual factors are key to addiction. The lack of purpose in our lives, or knowing what is worth doing with this life, can be at the core of it all.

Ultimately, it's not what you're addicted to that's significant. It's the overwhelming need to give in to something when you're under certain kinds of stress. So it's useful to ask yourself: what are the stress triggers that make me reach for my addiction? Often it's to avoid feeling an emotion (frequently fear), yet in essence that emotion is running our lives. What's that emotion for you? Is it dread of facing up to something in your life that isn't working? Your weight, your relationship, your work, your finances? Is it loneliness, not feeling your life matters, maybe a fear of getting older, or uncertainty about the future?

Whatever the reason, the good news is, there's hope out there. We can let go of our addictions if we become aware of what they are. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What am I doing that I tell myself is 'not so bad' or 'fine' ('fine' is often the word that addiction hides behind)?
- What's going on in my life that's making me avoid a change, or facing up to something difficult?
- What do I need to get honest about?
- Who do I need to forgive (often it may be yourself)?
- Who can help me?

Next, spend a moment finding your why: why must you release this addiction? This *why* is your fuel to help you kick it. It's the reason you must face this now, head on, and replace it with something positive. It's very healthy to find at least one enjoyable way to care for your health and body. It's different for everyone, but when you find something you love doing, be it dancing, hiking, running, swimming, it will be your method of release. And if you've been abusing your body in some way, when you get back in touch with how amazing it is, your higher sense of self-worth won't permit you to abuse it again with addictive behaviour (NB see separate box on overeating and drinking).

emptiness

It's also wonderful to have at least one project into which you can put your time and creativity. It can be reading a certain number of books, studying something new (language, music, etc), creating a website or selling something you make or love. Having a goal helps the mind focus and move away from the emptiness that addictions are often so good at filling. Try to be mindful when your addiction comes up: awareness of the issue is often more effective than just trying to stop it.

People who make a successful change are still very human, they make mistakes, they

aren't perfect, they don't get it right first time, they get emotional. But they do take action, they keep going, they give themselves time, they get their friends to help and they let go of any self-disapproval! Disapproval of yourself or of life is at the core of all addictions, so when that voice shows up, be aware of it, see it for what it is, and choose to believe something kind and true about yourself instead! Self-acceptance is key to overcoming any addiction.



Cappuccino, we must talk... I think you're addicted to me!

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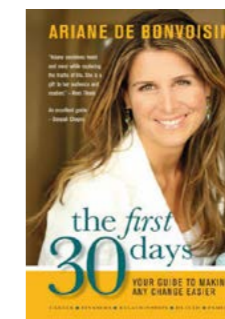
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FOOD AND DRINK: WHEN TO CALL IN THE PROFESSIONALS

People often mistakenly assume that food/drug/alcohol abusers lack willpower, and could stop simply by choosing to change their behaviour. However, addiction to food, drugs or alcohol changes the brain in ways that foster compulsive abuse, so quitting is difficult even for those who are ready to do so. In some cases, good intentions or a strong will are not enough and it's really important to get professional help.



Ariane de Bonvoisin, author of the recently-published book 'The First 30 Days', has interviewed more than 1000 people on how they handle change and is regularly consulted on the topic by American TV and radio networks. She recently launched an iPhone app called Mindful365 and has a website, www.arianedebonvoisin.com. Ariane currently lives in Cape Town. ●