



# Recognizing cravings

**By the time an individual has become addicted to prescription opioid medications, changes have occurred in the structure and function of the brain circuits that regulate mood and “reward” behaviors. These changes result in powerful and long-lasting cravings for the opioids. A craving is when the mind has developed an overwhelming desire for a drug.**

## What is a craving?

A craving can be a sudden urge that makes the individual want to use the drug again or think about using the drug again.

A craving can be triggered by environmental cues—familiar people, places, sights, smells and feelings—that give the individual a strong urge to use the drug again.

## Cravings have a long-term effect

The neurological changes resulting from addiction do not reverse themselves shortly after drug use has stopped. They often last for quite some time. Cravings can in fact last for months, and even years, after an individual has stopped using opioids.

Powerful cravings are also part of why the relapse rate (i.e., returning to drug use) is so high with opioid addiction. The user’s need to mollify the cravings can be so powerful that his or her attempt to stay abstinent can

seem difficult or impossible without medical help. During periods when the drug is not available to the user, the brain remembers the experience of the drug, and this contributes to the individual's relapse into drug use.

## Medication-assisted treatment is effective

Often, specific drug treatment medications are needed as part of helping the individual recover. These medications serve to suppress withdrawal symptoms and reduce the individual's craving for the substance, allowing the user to attain better stability and have a better chance of remaining free of the drug.

## Additional resources

### National Institute on Drug Abuse

[www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids)

**Family Doctor** <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/opioid-addiction.html>

### Drugfree.org

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

## Contact Us

Your program provides access to tools and other resources online or call us directly to speak to a professional counselor who is available everyday and at any time to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

*This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here*