

# The Meta Addiction Treatment Guide to: **Stress and Addiction**



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## **Thank You**

Thanks for downloading this guide about stress and addiction. Although stress is a normal part of life, failing to manage stress in a healthy way can make you more likely to use drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. Behavioral health experts refer to this type of behavior as self-medication.

Even though self-medication can provide some type of temporary relief from stress, it can also lead to:

- **Impulsivity**
- **Denial of reality**
- **Emotional and psychological distress**
- **Addictive behavior patterns**

Over time, self-medication can trigger relapse and prevent you from getting the help you need. The good news is there are many productive ways to effectively deal with stress. Learning these skills and techniques and consistently incorporating them into your daily life can help you avoid self-medication, overcome addiction, decrease the likelihood of relapse, and help maintain long-term sobriety.

You can't stop stress from infiltrating your life, but you can learn to manage it in a healthy way. We hope this guide helps you do that.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by stress, remember that we're here for you. You can reach us directly at [844-909-2560](tel:844-909-2560) or email us at [info@metaaddictiontreatment.com](mailto:info@metaaddictiontreatment.com).

Wishing you a healthy, productive, and enjoyable life,

**The team at Meta Addiction Treatment**





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Even though stress is the body's normal response to pressure, living in a constant state of anxiety and worry can also be a risk factor for addiction. This can be especially true when we're not sure how to cope with stressful life events. Challenging situations combined with poor coping skills can cause us to drink or use drugs impulsively. Behaving this way can trigger substance abuse and addiction challenges. However, not everyone who experiences stress develops an addiction. Because of this, many people wonder if high levels of stress increase the likelihood of addiction.

## **What Is Stress?**

Stress is the feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure. This pressure can result from any kind of change, such as new, unexpected, or threatening situations. These situations can make us feel overwhelmed, worried, and stressed.

Contrary to what we might think, the body's stress response can also be helpful. Our bodies produce stress hormones that trigger a fight or flight response when we're stressed. These hormones allow us to respond quickly and push through any fear or pain we may experience. This helps us, for example, to deliver a speech, run a marathon, or escape a threatening situation. Once the stressful event ends, the stress hormones dissipate. Too much stress can have long-term effects on our physical and mental health, however.



# The Meta Addiction Treatment Guide to: Stress and Addiction

## How Does Stress Affect the Body?

When the brain responds to stress and triggers the body's fight and flight response, our body reacts, changing how we feel and behave.

Even though we all respond differently to stress, some of the common physical symptoms of stress include:

- **Headaches**
- **Nausea**
- **Indigestion**
- **Excessive sweating**
- **Heart palpitations**
- **Aches and pains**
- **Shallow breathing and hyperventilation**
- **Constipation, bloating, or diarrhea**

Stress can also make us feel:

- **Anxious**
- **Afraid**
- **Sad**
- **Irritable**
- **Frustrated**
- **Depressed**
- **Angry or aggressive**

Our behavior can also change when we're stressed. For example, we may:

- **Be indecisive or inflexible**
- **Withdraw from people and snap at them**
- **Having problems going to sleep or staying asleep**
- **Skip out on eating meals or eat more than usual**
- **Experience sexual problems**
- **Have panic attacks or experience paranoia**

High levels of stress can also make us want to smoke, drink alcohol, take more medicine than usual, or use illicit drugs. When we try to use these substances to deal with our stress, we engage in self-medication.

# The Meta Addiction Treatment Guide to: **Stress and Addiction**

## **How Stress Can Lead To Self-Medication**

As the term suggests, self-medication tries to treat challenges by indulging in things that temporarily make us feel better. Most people try to self-medicate themselves by using large amounts of:

- **Food, alcohol, nicotine, or caffeine**
- **Prescription medications like opioids, benzodiazepines, or antidepressants**
- **Illegal substances such as methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, or ecstasy**

Here at Meta Addiction Treatment, we define self-medication as using drugs and alcohol to cope with a difficult situation. Even though there are several reasons why people self-medicate, many people use drugs and alcohol to feel better when they feel powerless and don't know how else to deal with the challenge they're facing.

Constantly feeling worried, anxious, or stressed can interfere with our daily lives. For example:

- **Not being able to sleep can make us irritable.**
- **Getting upset with others can hurt our relationships.**
- **Feeling like we're alone can make us feel depressed.**



# The Meta Addiction Treatment Guide to: Stress and Addiction

All of these emotions stem from stress and can compel us to reach for an alcoholic drink, take a prescription pill, or consume an illegal substance as a way to escape, numb, or deal with the pressure. Even though using these substances may provide some short-term relief, regular self-medication will only increase the number of challenges we face.

Consistently self-medicating can negatively impact our health, worsen our mood, hurt our relationships, worsen our mental health, and make us more vulnerable to developing an addiction.

## **How Stress & Self-Medication Can Lead To Addiction**

Even though experiencing stress is a natural part of life, constantly trying to self-medicate ourselves can, unfortunately, increase our risk of developing addiction challenges. Here's how.

### **1. Stress Can Lead To Impulsive Behavior**

Under stress, our bodies produce adrenaline, a hormone that elevates our blood pressure and boosts our energy levels. Although it helps us escape threats, adrenaline can also cause us to enjoy intense and thrilling activities. This need for stimulation can cause us to seek out addictive substances, increasing our risk of addiction.

### **2. Stress and Uncertainty Can Cause Emotional Distress**

When we're worried or fearful of the unknown, we can experience emotional challenges that can harm our health. These challenges can make us feel inadequate and negatively affect our mental health and overall well-being. If we don't deal with pressure in a healthy way, we might use alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism instead. If the emotional distress remains untreated, we may keep using drugs and alcohol, making us more vulnerable to addiction.

### **3. Self-Medication Can Trigger Addictive Behavior**

Even though it can provide some temporary relief, self-medication doesn't help us solve our problems. Instead, self-medication allows us to hide the challenges we face from others and ourselves. Sadly, this type of denial usually makes matters worse. In addition to causing physical, emotional, social, financial, and legal challenges, self-medication can also:

- **Trigger the development of new mental health challenges**
- **Cause unpleasant side effects if we're taking any type of medication**
- **Prevent us from actually getting to the root of the issue**
- **Deters us from getting the help we need to stop self-medicating**

# The Meta Addiction Treatment Guide to: Stress and Addiction

## Signs Of Self-Medication

Even though many people self-medicate, the habit isn't always easy to identify. To truly recognize self-medicating behavior, we need to take a moment to think about our actions and examine our motives. If we're using any substance, we need to understand why we're doing what we're doing. Are we drinking because we're feeling lonely and sad? Are we taking more pills than prescribed because we're stressed and feeling down?

Signs of self-medication can vary from person to person, but we may be using alcohol or drugs as a way of coping with difficulties if we:

- **Turn to drugs and alcohol when feeling anxious, stressed, and depressed.** Regularly drinking and using drugs to cope with stress, feel better, or escape boredom can be a sign of self-medication.
- **Experienced a triggering event and have increased our alcohol intake or started using drugs.** Losing a job or experiencing a separation, divorce, death, or sudden financial trouble can send anyone into a tailspin. When we attempt to self-medicate these troubles, we tend to drink more or start abusing prescription medications.
- **Feel worse after drinking or getting high on drugs.** Most people self-medicate to feel better. Unfortunately, the positive effects and relief are short-lived. Once these effects wear off, we can feel worse than before self-medicating. For example, we may notice:
  - **A decline in our physical health**
  - **Increased illness**
  - **Sudden and erratic mood changes**
  - **Depression, paranoia, or anxiety**
- **Notice that the challenges we're facing keep increasing.** Self-medicating may seem like a good idea at first, but it can often lead to more problems. Since we don't resolve anything when we self-medicate, our original cause of stress doesn't go away. Instead, it lingers. On top of that, our emotions may be out of whack, negatively affecting our mood and causing our relationships to suffer. Instead of things getting better, they get worse.

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## **Learn How To Manage Stress Without Drugs and Alcohol**

Stress happens. We can't avoid it, but we can learn how to manage stress without using drugs and alcohol as a way to cope. Our flexible outpatient treatment programs can help you overcome addiction, help you talk about what's causing you stress, and show you how to deal with your stress productively. Let us help you get there.

## **6 Practical & Healthy Ways To Deal With Stress**

Constantly living under high levels of stress can negatively affect the way you live. Learning to effectively manage stress can significantly improve your quality of life, making you less likely to turn to drugs and alcohol.

Some practical and healthy ways to deal with stress include:

- 1.** Listening to relaxing music. If you're a fan of classical music, we recommend renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma. If you're not a fan of classical music, try nature and ocean sounds or lo-fi music.
- 2.** Talking to a trusted friend or mentor. Being able to vent your frustration and receive a different perspective can help put your mind at ease.
- 3.** Slowing down and taking a break. Life moves fast, but you don't have to. Take a few minutes to rest. During this time you can meditate, pray, watch a funny video, spend time in nature, or take a few deep breaths.
- 4.** Exercising. Engaging in physical fitness activities increases blood circulation and helps decrease the number of stress hormones in the body. You don't have to have a strict exercise regimen. Moving just 20 minutes a day can make a significant difference.
- 5.** Spending time enjoying a hobby. Research shows that doing activities that bring you pleasure and joy can reduce stress levels by 50 percent and lower your heart rate as well. Some common hobbies to look into include baking, gardening, reading, journaling, painting, drawing, dancing, playing a sport, hiking, and biking.
- 6.** Visiting a therapist. If you've tried the tips above and still continue to feel overwhelmed by stress, don't hesitate to seek professional help. Your life, emotional well-being, and health are worth the time and investment.



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## **Empowering College Students To Take Charge Of Their Lives**

At Meta Addiction Treatment, we know that stress is a necessary part of life. We also know that not dealing with stress can lead to unhelpful behavior patterns that can increase the risk of addiction. Luckily, the majority of our team members are in active recovery and have learned to manage stress without turning to drugs or alcohol. They can help you learn to do the same.

Contact us today to speak to one of our recovery experts about stress management, addiction, and regaining control of your life.

As always, we're available 24 hours per day at [1-844-909-2560](tel:1-844-909-2560) or [info@metaaddictiontreatment.com](mailto:info@metaaddictiontreatment.com).

