

Addictions & Neurofeedback

Alcohol is the most commonly used addictive substance in the U.S., and 17.6 million people, 1 in every 12 adults, suffers from alcohol abuse or dependence, along with several million more who engage in risky binge drinking that could lead to alcohol problems. 88,000 deaths annually are attributed to excessive alcohol abuse.

Add in drug addictions and the estimate is that 23.5 million Americans have a problem, which is about 1 in every 10 Americans over the age of 12. There also has been an explosion of abuse and addiction to prescribed narcotics ('pain killers') in recent years. More people are now dying from such pain killers than all illegal drugs combined. Only about 11% of those with an addiction receive treatment.

The 'success rate' for treating alcohol and drug abuse is hard to determine because there are various ways to define 'success.' Is it the completion of a program? Staying sober or drug free for 1, 3 or 6 months, a year, or longer? And staying 'clean' is determined by what means, self-report? Or a spouse or parent agreeing? Or through lab testing like taking a breathalyzer or doing a urinalysis? And is a 'relapse' a single use of alcohol or drugs after a program, or continual use again?

Treatment centers generally claim that they succeed about 25-30% of the time, and that is if the person completes the program and typically does not include 'drop outs,' so the 'real numbers' are considerably lower. Alcoholics Anonymous' (AA) success rate is disputed to some extent, but it is generally considered to be in the same realm as other forms of treatment. Overall, there is a lot of room for improvement in working with addicted individuals.

Neurofeedback is an alternative approach to dealing with addictions. Some research on crack cocaine addicts, one of the more difficult addictions to treat, had a success rate of about 53% one year after treatment ended, as to no further substance usage. Research on alcohol abusers who were undergoing in-patient rehab has found an abstinence of 77% a year after neurofeedback treatment was completed. Other research on alcohol abuse puts success rates for neurofeedback treatment anywhere from 50-80%, again depending on how it is defined.

If you, or someone you know and care about has a problem with alcohol or drug abuse, consider neurofeedback as an approach to helping overcome it.



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