

# My Struggles with Addiction

Each addict's journey is different, that's why addiction is such a hard thing for people to understand. I'm not what people picture as a typical drug addict. You definitely wouldn't know it by looking at me. Even at my very worst, I was skinny, but I didn't look sick. Also in the midst of everything I was still able to complete post-secondary education. A number of different things can make individuals take the steps to start to make changes, mine was losing my mind. It's wasn't overdosing 7 times in a two month span, that unfortunately wasn't enough to get me to stop.

I thought I had hit the bottom so I checked myself into rehab, at which point I was heavily abusing prescription pain medication. I realized that my oxycontin addiction had control over me and I no longer had control over it. However, for me, rehab was quite possibly the worst mistake I could make; because I wasn't ready. Before entering rehab, I lived a pretty sheltered druggie existence. I had never smoked (crack) or poked (needles). At rehab is where I met people who were doing drugs that I had never come in contact with. There I was taught to rid myself of all my (bad) friends and make new relationships with (sober) people. However the new friends that I choose were the people that I met in rehab, and unfortunately when we got together after being released we had only one thing in common; our love for drugs. After rehab, my abuse went to a whole different level. Instead of chewing oxy pills as I had done in the past, I learned how to inject them; I also became friends with a girl who taught me the ins and outs of smoking crack.

I chose to stop using drugs when I experienced what the doctors called a "drug induced psychosis." For 3 days in a row I continuously injected myself with cocaine, I didn't eat or sleep and on the last day I smoked a big joint (that of all things is what pushed me over the edge to insanity). My Mom picked me up that morning to drive me to an appointment and from what she tells me, I was completely out of my mind. My Mom took me straight to the hospital and said "This is my daughter, but this is not my daughter." I remember hospital staff locking me in a room (I guess while they figured out what to do with me) then the next thing I remember is waking up on a gurney with my head, wrists, and ankles strapped down. After being there for about 2 weeks (which I have no recollection of) the doctors sat me down along with my loved ones and told us that I had done all the drugs that my body could handle, they said if I ever used any drugs again my brain was to the point where I could again have a drug induced psychosis but there was high chance that I wouldn't come back around again. For me that moment was my rock bottom, at that point I made the choice to change my life.

Before I started abusing opioid pain killers, I didn't consider myself and addict. I started smoking pot when I was 14, I moved onto mushrooms, and then acid, then ecstasy. After that came crystal meth and then cocaine. Although I used all these different drugs on a fairly regular basis, every weekend and occasionally during the week, I never considered myself an addict. I felt that I was just a recreational drug user who just preferred getting high over drinking like most kids in high school.

My first step in the right direction was when I decided that enough was enough and that I would never be able to stop using drugs on my own. I started seeing an addictions counselor on a regular basis. At the worst point in my addiction, I went to see her weekly and as I slowly got stronger, the frequency of our appointments lessened. After being

sober for almost 2 years I still try to see her monthly, she helps to keep me on the right track.

My next step in the right direction was my decision to start on a methadone maintenance program. For those who don't know what methadone is and does; it's a liquid narcotic prescribed by a doctor trained in addictions, to help addicts safely wean off opioids like oxycontin or morphine. From what I understand, methadone fills the receptors in the brain that crave opioids, and it also takes away the unbearable feeling of withdrawal. For me, it was the safest and most tolerable way of slowly weaning my body off pain killers. It helped give me the foundation to start focusing on other changes in my life that allowed me to get more stability.

I wish I could say that I instantly felt better once I made the choice to stop using drugs; but I can't. Unfortunately quitting for me was not an instant fix. I hurt a lot of people during this selfish time in my life. The benefits of being clean came slowly and I think that's the problem for most people who abuse drugs, they expect an instant fix. What has made it all worth it for me is all my recent accomplishments. Doctors rightfully suspended my license when I was using. When I was told that I had been sober for long enough to get my driver's license back, that was a huge accomplishment for me. Another huge step in the right direction was getting (and keeping) a full time job. My biggest accomplishment by far however has been gaining the trust and respect of my parents again. My parents are now so proud of me and for me that is worth so much.