Relapse: Understanding Post-Acute Withdrawal (PAWS)
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Why This Topic?

- PAWS is normal and to be expected
- What a person does to manage stress can reduce PAWS
- Client education and an increased understanding of the dysfunction in early recovery
- Understanding PAWS can help clients understand potential for relapse

Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

- According to the DSM-V, a substance use disorder is a pattern of symptoms resulting from the use of a substance that you continue to take, despite experiencing problems as a result.
- Substance-induced disorders, including intoxication, withdrawal, and other substance/medication-induced mental disorders, are detailed alongside substance use disorders.
- The DSM-5 recognizes that people are not all automatically or equally vulnerable to developing SUD. Some people have lower levels of self-control that predispose them to develop problems if they’re exposed to drugs.
- Substance use disorders: The range of SUD goes from Mild, Moderate, Severe with 11 criteria:
  - 2-3 symptoms = mild
  - 4-5 symptoms = moderate
  - 6 or more symptoms = severe
Progression of Addiction

- Abstinence - No use
- Experimental - Exploration, no pattern, limited negative consequences
- Social/Recreational - Intended use, no established pattern
- Habitual - Definite pattern; early signs of losing control
- Abuse - Continued use despite negative consequences
- Addiction - Compulsion and loss of control

*the pickle will never be a cucumber again*

What Is Relapse?

Simply put; A relapse is the return of using a substance or presence of a behavior after it has stopped for a period.

What is Withdrawal?

Withdrawal is defined as the body's attempt to rebalance after cessation of prolonged use of a substance or compulsive behavior.

"This is not desired which is the reason people choose to continue using"
Types of Withdrawal

Acute Withdrawal

Protracted Withdrawal

Post Acute Withdrawal (PAWS)

- Often expected
- First 48-72 is most critical (Detox)
- Critical to the individual
- Can last up to 14 days

- The environment triggers and cues
- Sensory triggers
- Cravings/Urges
- Last up to six months after use stops

Ex. Smell of burnt matches, seeing a white powder, or being in a place where you used drugs
Post Acute Withdrawal

- Often expected
- Can last up to 36 months
- Worst in the early months
- Cravings/Urges
- Not critical or life threatening

Post-Acute Withdrawal (PAW)
(emotional and psychological)

- Changes in appetite
- Cravings for sugar
- Dreams related to using
- Crying
- Irritable mood
- Anxiety/Depression
- Shakes
- Body aches

- Memory loss
- Sleep disturbances
- Cognitive impairments
- Difficulty managing stress
- Mood swings
- Sweats/Chills
- Aggressiveness
- Diarrhea
Why people experience PAWS

- The body needs to stabilize
- The brain needs to stabilize
- The stress of:
  - The addiction and the consequences
  - The stress of not being numb anymore
  - Lifestyle change
  - Lack of coping skills
- Our current situation due to the pandemic

Stress Management

- The more stress the more vulnerable the person is with few skills to cope!
- High need to develop coping skills and healthy supports
- PAWs can't be avoided but can be managed

Avoid the Potential for Relapse

- Education
- Stress Management
- Support
- Being Positive (Hope)
  - Relapse Prevention goal setting:
    - Prevent the development of the disease in nonusers
    - Stop inappropriate behavior in non-dependent users
    - Harm reduction model

"It is a challenge to manage PAW if the symptoms are not managed properly"
Treatment Modalities/Interventions

- Treatment Groups
- Self help groups
- Individual
- Support of family and friends
- Cognitive- behavioral restructuring
- Motivational interviewing
- What's available in your community?

References

- www.samhsa.gov
- https://www.verywellmind.com/is-paw-real-or-another-relapse-excuse-4109902

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