**Mechanisms of Addiction**

**Introduction**

Addiction is defined as an unhealthy attachment, habituation or dependency. There is also a positive use of the word addiction, meaning devotion. We will use the word in its more common negative or pejorative sense. Let us examine some basic principles involved in addiction.

**What is an addictive substance or habit?**

Anything that causes a temporary 'high' or feeling of well-being, followed by a ‛low', will tend to be addictive. As the effect wears off, another dose is needed to regain the temporary high. A negative addictive substance or habit is one that weakens the body or mind. It stimulates, rather than nourishes. When the 'high' wears off, the addict feels even worse than before. He or she is attracted back to the addictive substance to feel good once again. This is the basic principle of all addiction.

Something that causes well-being by nourishing the body is not usually considered addictive, although one could become devoted to it in a positive sense. The feeling of being nourished is usually different. Instead of a temporary high, there is a gentle lasting effect from nourishing substances or habits.

It is possible that a substance or habit is in part nourishing or nurturing and in part stimulative or addictive. This is true of habits, co-dependant relationships and food substances such as coffee.

**Addiction and the adrenal glands**

A simple mechanism involved in addiction is that cortisone and cortisol secreted by the adrenal glands provides a natural ‛high' or euphoric feeling. If you doubt this, ask someone who is taking high-dose cortisone. They feel no pain. Ever wonder how football players smash into one another at full speed and often jump up again smiling? It is not just due to knee pads and shoulder pads. Many professional athletes receive cortisone shots for painful knees, elbows, etc. Also, the excitement of the game itself revs up their adrenal glands temporarily and they feel less pain.

Cortisone and cortisol are called the glucocorticoid hormones because they raise sugar levels in the blood. They cause the conversion of amino acids and glycogen to glucose. One, but probably not the only reason for the euphoria resulting from these hormones, is the increase in blood sugar that results from their secretion.

Any substance, activity or habit that weakens the adrenal glands lowers the normal output of cortisone and cortisol. A person with weak adrenal glands craves the old euphoric feeling they once had. This is one reason Dr. Paul Eck says that slow oxidizers with weak adrenal glands think in the past. They remember the "good, old days" when they felt better. Slow oxidizers may be attracted to any substance or activity that even temporarily restores their adrenal secretions to produce a sensation of well-being.

Adrenal activity is related to the level of tissue potassium and especially sodium. Substances that raise sodium can enhance adrenal activity. Nutrients that raise sodium include vitamins B, C and E, manganese, chromium and molybdenum and eating adequate low-fat protein. Toxic metals that enhance sodium levels include cadmium, found in abundance in cigarette smoke.

Another way to enhance adrenal activity is to eliminate or reduce elements that lower sodium levels. Elements that lower tissue sodium include zinc and magnesium. For example, phosphoric acid in cola drinks lower both calcium and magnesium levels. Phytates found in grains lower calcium, magnesium and zinc. Alcohol consumption lowers zinc and magnesium.

Understanding how substances, habits and even emotions affect the adrenal glands can be a key to understanding their addictive power.

**The Cola Generation**

Among foods, soda pop and colas fulfill the criteria for addictive substances:

* They contain as much as 10 teaspoons of sugar. Adding so much sugar to the blood at one time causes a ‛rush' in many people, followed by a low blood sugar episode an hour or so later. The sugar also disrupts mineral metabolism, leaving a person weaker after consuming sugar.
* Many cola beverages contain caffeine. Caffeine stimulates the adrenal glands to produce adrenalin and cortisone, adding to the ‛high’. But the glands are then left weaker, producing fatigue and depression later. The FDA attempted to ban Coca Cola in the 1920's for precisely this reason.
* Cola drinks contain phosphoric acid. Phosphoric acid cuts the sugary sweetness and provides a tangy flavor. However, it also binds calcium and magnesium and prevents their absorption from the intestinal tract. The mineral deficiency causes one's rate of metabolism to increase temporarily. Later, however, the body returns to its normal rate of metabolism, causing a ‛low’ feeling.

**Sugar Blues**

The rapid rises and subsequent fall in blood sugar that occurs due to the use of cola drinks and other sugary foods eventually weakens the adrenal glands and the insulin secretion apparatus system. This occurs through depletion of vital minerals and vitamins that are involved in the normal functions of these organs and systems.

Nutritional depletion and nervous system dysfunctions initially lead to symptoms associated with hypoglycemia or low blood sugar. These include sweet cravings, reactions after eating sugar, irritability before meals and in the more extreme cases confusion, tremors, violence and even psychoses associated with sugar starvation in the brain. Later in life, high blood sugar or diabetes may result.

In both low and high blood sugar, the cells starve for fuel. This syndrome produces strong cravings for any substance that will enhance adrenal activity to help raise glucose levels. Coffee, colas, cigarettes and cocaine will all fill the bill. Alcohol is burned like sugar, so it too will help raise glucose levels. All alcoholics tend to have blood sugar problems, sometimes called carbohydrate intolerance. Ever notice at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings all the coffee that is consumed, often with sugar?

**Secondary Effects**

A mineral imbalance, especially combined with sugar consumption, often leads to other conditions such as a chronic intestinal candidiasis. Deficiencies of zinc and other minerals weaken the normal immune responses. Weakened adrenal glands cause copper to become biounavailable. Copper is the body's natural yeast killer. Also, eating sugar ‛feeds' the yeast which encourages its growth.

Candida produces alcohol and acetaldehyde, both toxic substances. The alcohol can produce its own addiction, even though a person has not touched a drop of alcohol. Both substances further weaken the body, affecting the will power and mental clarity. Repeated antibiotic therapy, birth control pills and steroid therapy are additional addiction factors as they contribute to yeast overgrowth and weaken body chemistry.

**Are Artificial Sweeteners The Answer?**

Nutrasweet and saccharin are not the answer to the sugar problem. Artificially sweetened drinks still contain phosphoric acid, many questionable chemicals and often caffeine. Nutrasweet has its own toxicity for some people. By deceiving the body's sweetness indicator, body chemistry is still affected. The sweet craving goes on. Also, studies reveal that people who consume diet drinks tend to overeat on other sugary foods.

**Starting Young**

Today, consumption of sugar and caffeine is so high and often begins so early in life that the seesaw pattern of blood sugar fluctuation feels normal to many children. No wonder many of the revved-up Pepsi generation are mixed up and attracted to stronger drugs later in life, both prescription and street drugs.

Recently, a teenager consulted me who admitted he was addicted to Coca Cola. He had spent time in a local mental institution for severe depression. During his stay, he was allowed all the Coca Cola he desired. No one understood why he made poor progress. When his nutritional imbalance was corrected, his depression lifted.

**The Dropout Society**

In 1979, the New York City school system began to remove all sugar, preservatives, additives and food colorings from the school lunch program. Eight-hundred-thousand children took part. Test scores raised 15 percentage points, from below national average to above average. No other changes were made in the school system. The entire experiment was carefully documented, controlled and reported in the International Journal of Biosocial Research (Vol. 8(2):196-203). A separate paper was even written that attempted to find a fault with the experiment.

Children need to understand that television advertisements for junk foods are total lies. Drinking Pepsi will not make you slim, beautiful or popular, even drinking gallons every day. Until simple issues such as these are addressed, much time and money are wasted on education, drug abuse, mental illness and even the homeless. These pressing problems will be solved much more easily when there is a return to healthful eating and living habits.

**Weakening The Will**

By weakening the adrenal glands, a person's resolve is also weakened. The adrenal glands are called the fight-or-flight glands. Our ability to secrete adrenal hormones, in large, determines our ability to handle stress. Adrenal glands weakened by sugar consumption or constant anger may reduce a person's ability to resist the temptations of other drugs. In other words, our ability to cope with our reality depends in part upon a balanced body chemistry. The use of any item or habit that weakens or unbalances the chemistry reduces the ability to handle reality. The temptation to go into denial then increases and with it the temptation to utilize drugs or other habits to deny reality.

It is possible to overcome these habits through faith, concentration or motivation. However, the chemical imbalances just make the process of overcoming these habits more difficult.

**Emotions And The Adrenal Glands**

Emotions can be powerful addictions as well. Watching violent movies, x-rated movies or horror movies, listening to loud music or the ghastly headlines on the nightly news are other ways to temporarily stimulate the adrenal glands. Arguing with your mate, hating the government and holding prejudices and resentments are other methods.

Many people have a fear-based personality. They feel separated from their Creator, which causes fear. Fear tends to produce paralysis, feelings of helplessness and a victim mentality. Paralysis shuts down the adrenal glands which are designed for action (either fighting or running). For some people, the response to this condition is to turn inward and become depressed.

However, another response is to become angry and resentful. Such emotions stimulate the adrenal glands into action. The emotion can become a drug. Many people are secretly angry all the time. They must continually find something or someone to become upset with in order to feel ‛well'.

We tend to project outside of ourselves everything we don't like, so that we can feel upset about the conditions around us. It is no wonder problems like violence, racism and domestic abuses are difficult to get rid of. They will never go away as long as we need them to stimulate our weakened adrenal glands.

**Getting Well**

As some people know, before real healing can occur one often has to feel the pain, exhaustion and depletion of the body. Alcoholics Anonymous calls this ‛bottoming out'. It leads to a shift in attitude. One no longer seeks the temporary high, but rather seeks the truth about what one has become. This rests the adrenal glands. Without rest, little rebuilding can take place.

The basis for practicing the old virtues of forgiving, loving, allowing, accepting and non-judgement is that these attitudes rest the body, allowing for a restoration of adaptive energy. One gives up fighting and running, so that true rebuilding can occur.

Along with an attitude shift, depleted glands and an imbalanced body chemistry can be supported and balanced through scientific diet modification and nutritional supplements. Other natural therapies can also support these changes. Once the emotional and the physical aspects of addiction are understood, one is on the road to a solid basis for health.

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