

Traditionally, the term addiction has been used to describe dependence on substances, such as alcohol and other drugs. More recently, addiction has been applied to a range of behaviors. Whether or not behavioral addictions are "real" addictions is a central controversy within the addiction field.

Behavioral addictions are patterns of behavior, which follow a cycle similar to that of substance dependence.

This begins with the individual experiencing pleasure in association with a behavior and seeking that behavior out, initially as a way of enhancing their experience of life, and later, as a way of coping with stress. The process of seeking out and engaging in the behavior becomes more frequent and ritualized, until it becomes a significant part of the person's daily life. When the person is addicted, they experience urges or cravings to engage in the behavior, which intensify until the person carries out the behavior again, usually feeling relief and elation.

Negative consequences of the behavior may occur, but the individual persists with the behavior in spite of this.

- Examples of addictive behaviors include:
- Problem gambling
- Sexual activities
- Food and eating
- Exercise
- Computer games
- Shopping
- Work

These addictions are real, in that they follow the same pattern as substance-based addictions and they result in problems in many areas of the individual's life. They have similar effects on relationships, which are often neglected in favor of the addictive behavior, undermining trust and putting pressure on partners and other family members to cover up and make up for difficulties arising from the addiction. There is increasing evidence that addiction to these behaviors involves similar brain mechanisms to substance-based addictions, although more research is needed to confirm and clarify how this happens.

<http://addictions.about.com/od/howaddictionhappens/f/behavioraladd.htm>