



Opioids Addiction

When Pain Relief Becomes a Life-or-Death Dependency

What is Opioid Addiction?

Opioid addiction is a chronic brain disorder driven by powerful changes to the body's pain and reward systems. Whether the substance is a prescribed painkiller, heroin, or a synthetic opioid, prolonged use reshapes how the brain processes pain and pleasure. Physical dependence can develop within weeks, and once established, the body demands the drug just to avoid withdrawal.

What Does It Look Like?

- **Using More Than Prescribed**
They run out of prescriptions early, visit multiple doctors, or turn to street supply to avoid running out.
- **Withdrawal Symptoms That Appear Within Hours**
Muscle pain, sweating, nausea, restlessness, and agitation begin quickly when they miss a dose.
- **Building a Tolerance to the Medication**
Doses that once provided relief no longer work, and the amounts they need continue to increase.
- **Nodding Off, Slowed Breathing, and Growing Isolation**
Withdrawal from family life, lost interest in responsibilities, and visible sedation even during conversations.

Why Does Opioid Addiction Become Chronic?

When someone has been through detox more than once and keeps returning to opioids, the pattern of relapse reflects how prolonged opioid use changes brain chemistry.

- 1) **Opioids Rewire Pain and Reward Circuits**
Prolonged use changes how the brain registers pain and pleasure. Withdrawal is physically and psychologically unbearable.
- 2) **Detox Only Addresses the Acute Phase**
Short-term programs stabilize the body but can't address the deeply embedded behavioral patterns and coping deficits that sustained their continued use.
- 3) **Co-Occurring Trauma, Chronic Pain, and Depression**
Most chronic opioid relapsers carry co-occurring conditions that go untreated, even undiagnosed, during short-term programs.

Prevalence:

5.9 Million people aged 12+ had OUD in 2023¹

Co-Occurrence:

64% of adults with OUD have a co-occurring mental illness²

Relapse Risk:

91% of patients relapsed following inpatient opioid detox³

Sources: ¹ SAMHSA, 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2024). ² Jones & McCance-Katz, Drug and Alcohol Dependence (2019). ³ Smyth et al., Irish Medical Journal (2010).

Long-Term Treatment for Opioid Addiction

Opioids alter the brain’s ability to manage pain, stress, and emotion. A short-term detox can address the acute physical crisis, but it can’t reverse **years of neurological adaptation** or treat the trauma, depression, and chronic pain that sustain the cycle. Families watch their loved one stabilize, only to relapse within weeks.

Our long-term, progress-based model gives the brain **extended time to recalibrate while rebuilding the coping skills**, accountability structures, and behavioral patterns that opioids replaced. Clients advance through treatment when they demonstrate real transformation, not when a calendar date arrives.



“Families tell us their loved one completed detox and looked stable. A month later, they were using again. It isn’t that detox failed, but that the treatment didn’t address the deeper issues. That is what happens when a program ends before the real work begins.”

 **Brook McKenzie, LCDC**
CEO, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Opioid Addiction

When opioid addiction is treated without addressing the conditions underneath it, the cycle continues. Trauma, chronic pain, depression, anxiety and other **mental health disorders co-occur with opioid use disorder at elevated rates**, and each condition reinforces the other: unresolved pain or trauma drives use, and opioid use deepens the psychological damage.

At Burning Tree Ranch, we create an **individualized treatment plan addresses opioid dependence alongside co-occurring conditions** through evidence-based therapies including EMDR, CBT, DBT, and trauma-informed care, building toward lasting, sustainable sobriety.

Dual Diagnosis Defined:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation’s only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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