



MILLENNIALS AND ADDICTION TREATMENT



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Whether you're a millennial thinking about getting help for an addiction or you're the concerned parent of a young person who might need help, this eBook is for you. Millennials are a unique population group compared to older generations. To understand the best approach to treating addiction for millennials, it's important to understand this up-and-coming generation.



WHO ARE THE MILLENNIALS?

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



Millennials get a lot of ribbing from older generations who find them pampered and precious. But the truth is, this generation, which was born from around 1982 to around 2002, is a high-achieving bunch who look for balance in life and aren't afraid to think for themselves, according to a recent Pew Research study.¹

Millennials are very different from their parents' and grandparents' generation. They're the most politically progressive generation modern America has ever seen. They're overwhelmingly dedicated to social justice, and they're self-aware.

Just 21 percent of millennials are married, compared with twice that many of their parents' generation at the same stage in life. They're staying single and childless longer and enjoy a tight community of friends and a close relationship with their immediate family. They prefer purposeful, meaningful work and a healthy balance between their career and personal life. They tend to have very strongly held values and a weaker attachment to material things than older generations. They're known for being highly collaborative and creative and for thinking outside the box.



It's no wonder, then, that millennials are going a long way toward reducing the high prevalence of drug abuse, teen pregnancy, abortion, violent crime, suicide and low SAT scores that marked the coming-of-age of their baby boomer grandparents. The baby boomers were born between the end of World War II and the advent of birth control pills in the early 1960s. They got married young and often started families before they were entirely ready. Their generation indelibly shaped the millennials in many ways.

THE RAMPANT DRUG USE
THAT STARTED WITH THE
BABY BOOMERS BEGAN A
SLOW, STEADY DECLINE.

Generation X: A Closer Look at Mom and Dad

Generation X, which was born to the boomers between roughly 1965 and 1984, is the generation of the latchkey kid. In general terms, Gen Xers were largely left to their own devices and grew up without a lot of parental supervision or adult intervention. They spent free time roaming their neighborhoods in unsupervised packs from dawn to dusk. They didn't wear bike helmets or seat belts. If they wanted to play baseball or soccer, they did it in backyards and empty fields, not after-school programs and city leagues.

Somehow, Generation X survived their childhood. When it was their turn to have kids, they took parenting far more personally and seriously than their parents did. The child once again became revered in American society. Abortion rates went down, divorce rates declined, smoking in the house and spanking your child became taboo, and the rampant drug use that started with the boomers began a slow, steady decline.

Enter the Millennials

When millennials were born to Gen X starting in 1982, they were showered with love and attention. Gen X kept their kids safe with intense baby-proofing, nursery monitors and an arsenal of other equipment invented just for them. They doted on their children and gave them everything they possibly could.

Generation X supervised their kids intensely. They structured their activities and scheduled their lives. Play dates became a thing. Getting your child into the right preschool was just as important as getting them into the right college in many circles. Generation X involved themselves heavily in their children's education and managed their social life. They took great pride in nurturing their children and molding their future with careful planning and heavy involvement.

Largely as a result of this intense parental involvement and sheltering, Millennials have a reputation for being narcissistic, lazy, impatient and self-absorbed. But they're overwhelmingly good citizens and excellent neighbors. They socially progressive, supporting gay marriage, civil rights and multiculturalism. They place a high value on individuality and personal choice. They're adept at creating their own belief systems rather than relying on long-held religious institutions for spiritual fulfillment. Overall, they're a pretty optimistic group, given the world they've inherited.



A group of young adults, likely Millennials, are gathered outdoors at night, reaching up to release a large, glowing paper lantern. The scene is illuminated by the warm light of the lantern and the cool blue tones of the twilight sky. The background shows blurred city lights and a red neon sign, suggesting an urban setting. The overall mood is one of hope and celebration.

THE PREVALENCE OF MILLENNIAL DRUG ABUSE

COMPARED WITH OTHER GENERATIONS



The National Survey on Drug Use and Health has followed the drug habits of Americans since the 1970s. According to the NSDUH, the baby boomers used more alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, prescription stimulants, heroin and sedatives at their peak than the millennial generation currently uses.

According to Monitoring the Future, a long-term epidemiological study of American adolescents and adults conducted by the University of Michigan, 55 percent of young people in 1975 used an illegal drug in high school at least once. After a long, gradual decline, the percentage of high school students with a lifetime history of illegal drug use has held steady at around 48 percent since 2011.

According to findings by Monitoring the Future:

- ◆ Baby boomers consumed the most alcohol at the age of 19, whereas millennials' peak usage occurred at age 22.
- ◆ More than 10 percent of baby boomers reported past-year abuse of sedatives, while less than two percent of millennials reported past-year sedative abuse.
- ◆ While 50 percent of baby boomers have used marijuana in the past year, only around 30 percent of millennials have, but millennials' views on legalization are more progressive than the boomers' are.
- ◆ At their peak sedative usage around age 22, more than 10 percent of baby boomers reported past-year use, but less than two percent of millennials report past-year use of these drugs.

Younger Millennials Continue the Steady Decline of Drug Abuse

Past-year use of heroin among teens is at a historical low, according to Monitoring the Future, and so is binge drinking. In 2015, 17.2 percent of high school seniors engaged in binge drinking, compared with 31.5 percent in 1998. Similarly, in 2015 just 38 percent of high school seniors reported having been drunk in the past 12 months, compared with over 53 percent in 2001.

Still, despite their tamer drug use habits, millennials between the ages of 18 and 20 account for the highest rate of current illicit drug use, with 22.7 percent of that population reporting illegal drug use in the past month. The next highest rate is among 21–25-year-olds, with 21.5 percent reporting past-month use. Additionally, it's estimated that around 1.3 million millennials between the ages of 12 and 17—or five percent of this population—had a substance use disorder in 2014.



Prescription Painkillers: Millennials' Drug of Choice

While millennials use fewer drugs overall than the baby boomers did during their peak in the late 1960s, they abuse prescription painkillers at a much higher rate. Fewer than eight percent of Generation X and baby boomers abused prescription painkillers in the past year during their peak use, but more than 12 percent of millennials reported past-year abuse at the ages of 19 and 20. In 2015, 4.7 percent of millennials between 12 and 17 abused prescription painkillers in the past year, while 8.5 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds reported past-year use, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.³

Millennials and Opioid Overdose

The American Council on Science and Health reports that millennials between the ages of 25 and 34 are the most likely age group to die of an opioid overdose.⁴ In 2010, the overdose rate for opioids for this age group was 2.2 per 100,000. By 2015, it had more than quadrupled to 9.7 per 100,000. Between 2013 and 2014, the rate of overdose for millennials increased by more than 10 percent, from 12,716 opioid overdose deaths in 2013 to 13,962 in 2014, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.⁵ All told, more than one out of every 12 deaths among millennials between the ages of 25 and 34 is due to an opioid overdose.



MILLENNIALS, TECHNOLOGY AND MENTAL HEALTH



A study of millennial college students published in the journal *Qualitative Social Work* suggests that the mental health problems of millennials are more severe than those of other generations.⁶ Since 2000, the number of college students diagnosed with depression has increased from 10 to 15 percent, and their mental health problems appear to be more serious than those of past generations.

According to the study, millennials have a high level of anxiety and perfectionism that older generations don't have. This is, in part, due to their parents' tendencies to hover over them and involve themselves deeply in their children's lives. This "helicopter parenting" has resulted in a generation that has grown up relying on having things done for them. It has prevented them from developing essential decision-making, problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. Most importantly, it has contributed to an increase in depression, panic disorders, OCD and ADD.



Another major contributor to an increase in mental health problems among millennials may be their reliance on technology. Because this generation grew up with the internet, cell phones, social media and other technologies that offer instant gratification and easy solutions, many millennials are unprepared for handling societal pressures, solving problems and coping with stress and anxiety.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:⁷

- ◆ 11.4 percent of youth aged 12 to 17 had a major depressive episode in the past year.
- ◆ 20 percent of young adults aged 18 to 25 were diagnosed with a mental illness in the past year. Nearly four percent of 18-to-25-year-olds were diagnosed with a serious mental illness in the past year.
- ◆ Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people age 15 to 24.

The Link Between Mental Health and Substance Abuse

A mental illness and the inability to cope with its symptoms is a common risk factor for substance abuse. People often use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate symptoms of mental illnesses. The most common mental illnesses among millennials are anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, attention-deficit disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Unfortunately, substance abuse almost always worsens a mental illness due to brain changes caused by drugs and alcohol. Worsening mental illness can lead to heavier substance abuse, which can lead to addiction and dependence. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one-third of people with any mental illness and half of those with a severe mental illness also have a drug or alcohol addiction.⁸ Conversely, one-third of people who are addicted to alcohol and half of those addicted to drugs also have a mental illness.

Millennials' reliance on technology itself may also increase the risk of developing a substance use disorder. According to a recent Baylor University study, college women spend an average of 10 hours a day on their phones, while their male counterparts spend almost eight.⁹ This excessive cell phone use can result in a behavioral addiction that leaves young people deeply vulnerable to other addictive behaviors, the study found.



MILLENNIALS AND ADDICTION TREATMENT

**FEWER THAN 10 PERCENT OF
AMERICANS WHO HAVE A DRUG
OR ALCOHOL ADDICTION GET
THE TREATMENT THEY NEED TO
GET BETTER AND STAY BETTER.**

Young adults have the highest addiction treatment rate of any other age group. Millennials between the ages of 20 and 29 account for nearly 30 percent of treatment admissions, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.¹⁰ By comparison, Gen Xers between the ages of 35 and 39 account for 11.7 percent of treatment admissions, while 50-to-59-year-olds account for just 10.4 percent.

Why Are Millennials More Likely to Enter Treatment?

One reason for the higher rate of treatment may be the close relationship millennials have with their families. Gen X parents of addicted young people are likely to get involved and do whatever it takes to ensure their child gets help for an addiction.

Another reason might be millennials' attitudes toward treatment. This generation is less likely than older ones to stigmatize addiction and mental health problems, and they have more permissive attitudes toward drug use in general. This helps to remove morality from the equation, making young people less embarrassed or ashamed about engaging in treatment.

Either way, it's important to note that overall, fewer than 10 percent of Americans who have a drug or alcohol addiction get the treatment they need to get better and stay better for the long-term.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING A TREATMENT PROGRAM FOR A MILLENNIAL

Now that you have a better understanding of what makes millennials tick, let's look at what an ideal treatment situation looks like for a young person.

A Holistic Approach

A holistic treatment program will include a variety of traditional and complementary therapies that address a wide range of issues. Cognitive behavioral therapy is the cornerstone of addiction treatment and helps individuals replace self-destructive ways of thinking and behaving with healthier ways. But complementary therapies are also an important aspect of treatment, especially for millennials. Art therapy, music therapy, adventure and outdoor therapy and activities like yoga and meditation build on millennials' self-awareness. They help young people develop essential coping skills for handling stress, social and academic pressures and interpersonal challenges.





Family Therapy

Especially for adolescent millennials, multidimensional family therapy is a crucial part of treatment. This research-based therapy involves the whole family in treatment, which has been shown to improve outcomes. Family therapy helps improve communication among family members, reduce dysfunctional behaviors in the family system and helps parents learn the difference between supporting their children and enabling them.

Dual Diagnosis Treatment

Because many millennials have a mental illness that co-occurs with their addiction, choosing the right program is essential for successful recovery. Treating co-occurring disorders, also known as a dual diagnosis, requires collaborative, integrated treatment that addresses the substance abuse in the context of the mental illness, and vice versa. Treating just an addiction or just a mental illness has very limited effectiveness for long-term recovery.



Medication-Assisted Treatment

Millennials have the highest rate of opioid addiction, which takes hard work to overcome due to intense cravings and the way in which opioids rewire the brain. Medication-assisted treatment, or MAT, is one way to treat opioid addiction. MAT involves administering medications like buprenorphine or methadone, which prevents the onset of withdrawal and keeps cravings at bay.

While some believe that MAT just replaces one addiction with another, the truth is far more complex. Opioid relapse rates are very high, and MAT enables young people to focus on developing the critical skills and strategies they need to end their substance abuse without having to cope with intense cravings. MAT has also been shown to increase millennials' engagement in treatment, which improves the outcome.

12-Step Alternatives

Support groups are a crucial part of a successful recovery program. The most common of these are 12-step programs, which are very structured and follow prescribed steps. However, some millennials may not be as receptive to this type of support group, given their tendency to buck tradition. A treatment program that offers alternatives to the 12 Step program, such as SMART Recovery or Secular Organizations for Sobriety, may be more suitable for millennials.

Purpose-Driven Recovery

Millennials are a purpose-driven generation, and they do well with purpose-driven treatment. A holistic treatment program that helps millennials identify and use their strengths, find purpose and meaning in life, set goals and draw on their internal resources to recover is likely to be very effective for young people.



A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a white sleeveless top with a black pattern, is smiling and leaning on a metal railing on a balcony. In the background, a white train is visible on tracks, and there are green plants and a building. A dark teal semi-transparent banner is overlaid at the bottom, containing the text "THERE IS HOPE" in white capital letters. A thin vertical teal line is on the left side of the banner.

THERE IS HOPE



Hope is the foundation of recovery, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.¹¹ Hope is the belief that a better future is possible, and millennials are a hopeful group. The right treatment program and a high level of support from family and friends improves millennials' chances of successful long-term recovery.

Treatment can help you or your millennial loved one not only end a drug or alcohol addiction but also enjoy an overall higher level of happiness, well-being, life satisfaction, personal motivation and empowerment moving forward.

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