

Dancing with Discomfort

INDIGENOUS WISDOM FOR A WORLD SEEKING ESCAPE

Reclaiming the power of intentional
challenge in addiction recovery

OUR INTENTIONS

While we often focus exclusively on trauma when discussing addiction, today we will explore an equally important but often overlooked dimension: **our relationship with pleasure and the wisdom of intentional discomfort.**

The modern world is increasingly built for physical ease.

Our primal nervous systems were developed in physical struggle.

This mismatch causes our brains and bodies to not mature completely, leading to increased addiction.

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

A neurobiological and spiritual imbalance that manifests as a compulsive movement toward pleasure, numbing, and comfort, and away from pain.

CENTRAL IDEAS

Addiction is not just an escape from pain, but a disordered relationship with pleasure itself.

Addiction flourishes in environments that prioritize constant gratification and convenience.

Addiction potential is diminished through the strengthening practices of meaningful and controlled hardship.

WHAT IS ADDICTION HEALING?

True healing requires not only addressing past trauma, but rebuilding the mind's capacity for beneficial struggle.

This is wisdom Indigenous traditions around the world have preserved through practices that strengthen the brain, nervous system, *and* the human spirit.

KEY PLAYERS IN PLEASURE AND MOTIVATION

Dopamine: *Drives* the individual towards pleasure.

Opioids: Reduces pain and increases pleasure. Produced in the body (endogenous) or taken from the outside environment (exogenous)

PLEASURE PATHWAYS

Repeated exposure to high-reward stimuli changes dopamine response and alters brain function (specifically in the prefrontal cortex).

The brain forms stronger neural pathways for effortless rewards than for earned ones.

Dopamine drives pursuit, but endogenous opioids create the sensations of satisfaction and contentment.

OUR MODERN ADDICTING ENVIRONMENTS

Easy, fast dopamine and a deficiency of natural opioids primes the brain for addiction.

Processed foods and excessive sugar

Digital dopamine (gaming, social media, porn)

Instant gratification

Ease of controlled environments

Lack of physical activity and challenge

HOW WE CREATE ENDOGENOUS OPIOIDS

Lack of endogenous opioids reduces ability to deal with pain (current or historical)

Physical Exertion

Controlled Physical Stress

Rhythmic Movement

Social Connection

Laughter and Play

Earned Achievement

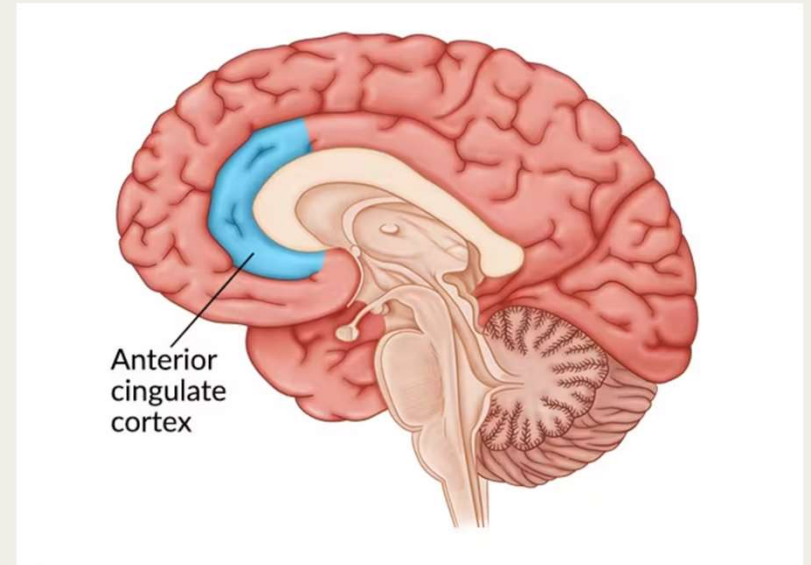
Sunlight and Low Carbohydrate Diets

OUR SPIRITUAL SENSE OF SELF

Anterior Midcingulate Cortex

Involved in self regulation, control of thoughts, pain processing, and sense of self.

Only develops and grows through doing hard, meaningful things.



THE WISDOM OF INTENTION CHALLENGE

Resilience against addiction: reduce the ‘pull’ of dopamine, and increase natural opioid creation.

How?

Do challenging, meaningful things,
and limit what creates fast dopamine.

We are trees.

We are '*antifragile*'.

INDIGENOUS MEDICINE PRACTICES

Traditional practices almost always involved controlled discomfort

Sweatlodge, fasting, vision quests, physical exertion, spirit baths, deep self-honesty.

Developed mental strength, self-regulation, community and spiritual connection.

‘Hormetic Stress’ regenerates brain regions and ‘resets’ opioid system.

THE CURRENT CRISIS

Modern environment and drug supply exploiting pleasure pathways

Double impacts of historical trauma and loss of traditional practices

Treatment approaches often only addressing half of the equation (trauma) while ignoring pleasure-seeking components.

THE CURRENT CRISIS

Addiction Research & Theory (2024)

Treatment programs emphasizing comfort, removal of triggers, and stress reduction without resilience-building challenge components showed 72% higher relapse rates.

Moving Beyond Trauma (2023)

Indigenous treatment programs exclusively focused on addressing historical trauma without including resilience practices showed minimal improvement in addiction outcomes compared to programs integrating both.

CALL TO ACTION

Enhance understanding of addiction processes as being related to both trauma and pleasure-seeking.

Examine our relationship with pleasure and discomfort, and how this is impacting our spirits, resilience, and relationships.

Thank you.
