

# Hope In The Form Of Personalized Treatment: 4 Solutions To Sustain Opioid Addiction Recovery

By: Dr. Mark Calarco | American Addiction Centers



Opioid addiction numbers are scary – indeed, many consider opioid abuse an epidemic – but they often overshadow the many important advances we’ve made in treating it.

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, [21.5 million Americans](#) ages 12 and older had substance abuse disorders in 2014. Of them, 1.9 million were addicted to painkillers, and 586,000 used heroin. But a better understanding of addiction as an illness and a combination of personalized, highly effective treatments are offering new

hope in the fight against opioid addiction across America.

**[Related Article: Learn The Benefits Of Spirituality In Addiction Recovery](#)**

### **How Did It Get So Bad?**

The road to today's [opioid epidemic](#) is paved with good intentions. It began when mostly well-meaning healthcare providers overprescribed opioid medications to relieve intense pain. Excess pills quickly found their way onto the streets, selling at significant premiums. Then, governments at the state and federal levels successfully reduced unjustified opioid prescriptions and their diversion to the streets.

Stricter laws and transparency led to scarcity (and therefore increased street values) of prescription medications. People without prescriptions who had already become addicted turned to less expensive and easier-to-get heroin. The rest, as they say, is history.

But that history is recent, and its effects are gradually being understood as more and more people learn to spot opioid addiction and find help in conquering it.

### **Spotting Opioid Addiction**

In some ways, people in the grips of addiction share many of the same behaviors. Some traits can include poor performance in school, sports, and work; high absenteeism; constantly asking for money; neglecting personal hygiene; clashing with law enforcement; changing social groups; and stealing from friends or family to support a habit.

But opioid addiction also shows itself in less conspicuous ways: sleeping inordinately long or at odd hours, constantly yawning, a persistently runny nose and teary eyes, unusual irritability, nausea, restlessness, and increased heart rate. Still, many patients with opioid addiction can maintain their

composures and daily responsibilities as long they get their regular fixes.

If you suspect a friend or family member may be struggling with opioid or heroin addiction, be vigilant of the signs above. Also, take some time to learn about the various successful treatment options that are helping others change their lives for the better.

## **Hope in the Form of Personalized Treatment**

As the government learned, fighting opioid addiction isn't as easy as simply taking away the drugs of choice. Every person struggling with addiction suffers an illness, and the key to beating addiction is to solve the riddle of that illness.

To that end, there are several proven treatment options for addressing addiction, the most successful of which are hormonal balance testing, medication-assisted treatments, 12-step programs, and cognitive behavioral therapy.

### **▪ Hormone Testing**

Many people have [hormonal imbalances](#) without knowing it – and age isn't a factor. Everything from the environment to the foods we eat and the stress we're going through can negatively affect our hormones. If someone has an undetected hormone imbalance, they may struggle with weight, energy, work, mood, and other health problems that would go undiagnosed. This could increase morbidity and mortality long-term. In addition, she may respond poorly to medical treatment.

Testing for hormonal imbalances isn't a sole solution – it's an addition to other treatments and therapies someone with addiction should consider, especially considering the added stress that recovery can have on someone's body. If you or someone you know is going through recovery, talk to a doctor about testing hormone imbalances throughout your journey to maintain a balance. Most hormone imbalances are treatable, and

could [reduce the chance of relapse](#) by giving the person with addiction the energy and focus to keep going.

### ▪ **Medication-Assisted Treatment**

[Medication-assisted treatment](#) provides a holistic approach to addiction treatment by combining the use of medication (methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone) with counseling and behavior therapy. The paradigm of addiction treatment is changing to rely increasingly on medication-assisted treatment; however, addiction is also a psychological condition, so counseling and behavior therapy are equally necessary for long-term recovery.

### ▪ **12-Step Programs**

The principles for 12-step programs were outlined more than 65 years ago to prepare those addicted to alcohol for a “[lifelong process of recovery](#).” Successful programs are structured with group and individual therapy, personal time, education, and community self-help groups (like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous). Choose a program that also incorporates family days to teach family members how to help and cope with their loved ones’ conditions.

There are many discussions about the underpinnings of these groups, but they offer key components hard to find elsewhere. Mentorship and community are powerful tools in recovery. Being among others who understand what you’re going through lends strength. Learning solutions and receiving support from peers can help interrupt the “triggering” process that urges a person to use again. Connection is important in recovery, and 12-step programs provide that.

**[Related Article: The Disease Of Addiction Knows No Prejudice: What You Need To Know](#)**

### ▪ **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**

To truly change, we must address our negative, inaccurate

perceptions and thinking. Cognitive behavioral therapy is [a form of psychotherapy](#) that teaches patients to recognize how their emotions affect their perceptions and reactions. It can help treat mental-health issues that often lead to or exacerbate addiction, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and more.

The first step to recovery is to *want* to recover. The next step is to seek family and friends' support, which is often critical to following through with treatment, especially for those about to go through withdrawal.

Along with your supporters, seek a treatment facility that offers medication-assisted treatment, as well as individual and group psychosocial therapies, family therapy, and solid discharge and follow-up planning.

Addiction – especially opioid addiction – is challenging, but it's more treatable today than ever before.

*Dr. Mark Calarco is the national medical director of [American Addiction Centers](#), a leader in drug and alcohol abuse treatment. He is a pioneer in treating hormone imbalances in recovering individuals and has served as a board member for the State of Tennessee Medical Laboratory Board and the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine. Dr. Calarco was also the first board-certified anti-aging and regenerative medicine specialist in Tennessee.*