

DOPAMINE NATION:
A review of the book by Anna Lembke, MD.
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WHAT IS DOPAMINE?

Dopamine is a chemical we make in our brain.

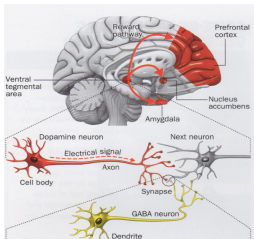

It's a neurotransmitter which bridges the gap between neurons.

Dopamine is the most important neurochemical when discussing either pleasure or motivation.

It is produced in the 'reward circuit', which includes the nucleus incumbens, and the ventral tegmental and the prefrontal cortex.



WIRED FOR ADDICTION

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T HAVE IT?

Absence of dopamine = absence of motivation.

Mice that were genetically altered to not have dopamine receptors, starved to death.

So, lots of dopamine in our reward pathway means we are motivated to get our drug of choice.

So called "normies", people without a predisposition to addiction, give up after awhile - **we don't!**

Think about what lengths did you go to get your drug of choice?



WHAT MAKES SOMETHING ADDICTIVE?

It's anything that releases dopamine.

In today's world we are so saturated with high-reinforcing substances and behaviors.

Everything is urging us to do more and to do it faster.

We are facing a world that encourages compulsive over-indulgence on every level.



WHY WE GET ADDICTED

1. Quantity: there is so much of every type of stimulation available now; during prohibition alcoholism and liver disease decreased 50%.

2. Potency: the quality of substances and thresholds have increased dramatically – think playboy magazines vs. child pornography.

3. Novelty: it's the choice of how many more drugs are available – this includes digital drugs.



WHY WE GET ADDICTED

The more dopamine that gets triggered in our brain and the quicker that it is released = increased level of addiction.

The "drug of choice" is different for people. Often there is more than one. But everyone is not addicted to everything.

According to Dr. Lembke, almost every human being has been "drugified".



WE HAVE BECOME "DRUGIFIED"

That means that we crave, even while we are consuming – (we want more – there is no saturation point).

Human connection has been drugified – think of the dark side of the internet.

Sex has become extremely drugified.

Even books/Netflix, etc., all with unbearable cliff-hangers that keep us hooked.

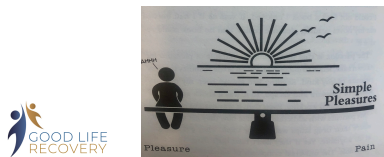
Even chess has been drugified - shorter, faster games online.

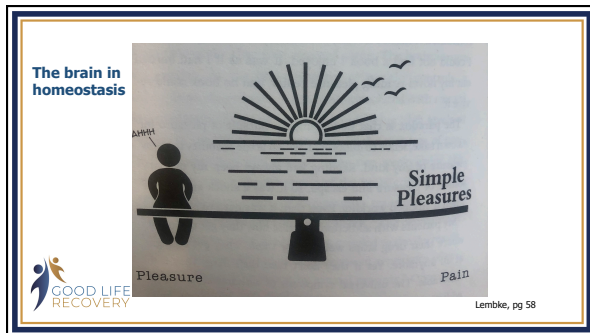


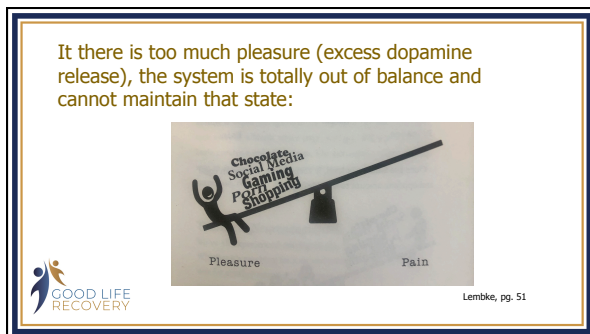
THE NEUROSCIENCE OF PLEASURE & PAIN

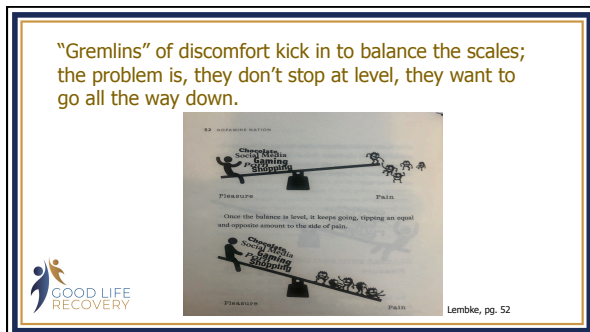
It is a fairly new scientific finding that pleasure and pain are actually co-located in the brain.

The brain wants to continuously balance to homeostasis.

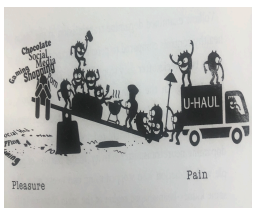








The gremlins 'camp out' in our brain, so our balance is tilted towards pain: that's why there is a price to pay for every high



GOOD LIFE RECOVERY

Lembke, pg. 55


BAD NEWS/GOOD NEWS

Normal pleasure no longer works.

We develop "tolerance" – which means we need more just to feel ok.

Good News: with enough abstinence we regain our balance.

However, the gremlins are always waiting in the wings, ready to jump to work again.




GOOD LIFE RECOVERY

FORWARDED IS FOREARMED

Remember: if you are kicking an addiction, it **WILL** feel worse before it feels better - because you are balanced towards the pain side.

Abstinence is the key to resetting the brain. The sweet spot is around 4 weeks.

Insight: When you are 'blinded by pleasure', in the throws of addiction, you can't see cause and effect; with sobriety you can.



GOOD LIFE RECOVERY

ACTIVITIES TO STRENGTHEN BALANCE

HORMESIS: when you press on the pain side, the gremlins jump over to the pleasure side:
cold showers; intermittent fasting;

Also, self-soothing techniques that activate the vagus nerve (parasympathetic system) like:
yoga, meditation, being in nature, being of service, basically anything that slows you down and brings you inward

are ways to create a healthy balance and a resilient ability to restore it quickly when life gets stressful – and the gremlins return.



Reflection and Active Change

1. Think back to your struggle with addiction and write down a few times you realized that you were feeling worse more often than better.
2. Are there other ways you notice yourself getting into addictive functioning, i.e., digital drugs/social media, sugar, exercise.
3. Now reflect on how that has changed with sobriety. List specific things you notice now that feel much better.
4. What will you do to ensure that you are monitoring your homeostasis and addressing any ways in which you are getting caught up in the "drugification" of our modern world.