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## Women and addictions: Causes, risks & 3 pillars for coping

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### ABSTRACT

The number of addicted women has been increasing steadily for years. Even today, the living conditions of many women are still based on dependencies: they are handicapped due to their family, husband or children, low earnings or because of little opportunities in the choice of education and career, recruitment and promotion that they have. Even today, women usually bear the main responsibility for the educational work of their children making them renounce of their own career.

### How does addiction affect women?

Women's' consumption of addictive substances is clearly different from that of men: women tend to a so-called „silent addiction“. They consume secretly, discreetly and unspectacularly. When their consumption of addictive substances becomes known to their environment, they are more likely to meet with contempt, rejection and less support in psychiatric care.

It is also noticeable that women with addiction suffer much faster social decline and psychophysical illnesses and tend to neglect their self-care.

### What are the increased risks of women suffering from addiction?

**With regards to the consumption of alcohol**, it is medically proven that women cannot convert alcohol well due to their metabolism. Thus, they become easier ill and quicker addicted. An alcohol disorder causes a number of other diseases.

**The risk of breast cancer** is significantly higher in alcohol-dependent women. Even with lower alcohol consumption, liver cirrhosis is two times higher in women than in men. In addition to that, there are **anxiety disorders, eating disorders and mental disorders**. Although women are quicker to consult a doc-

tor about health problems, they conceal the actual causes of their complaints for a long time when it comes to addictive substances. Quite often, an addiction is only diagnosed when severe physical sequelae have occurred. Women are less likely to find their way into therapy – there, however, social pressure could be taken off their shoulders.

### Which women are particularly frequently affected by addiction?

Women who experienced sexual abuse or violence in their childhood are considered to be in a particular risk for addictions. Moreover, husbands and partners with an addiction are not only a family burden: They also increase the risk for the wife of developing an addiction, too. A new threat exists for women working in classic male professions: as they experience a high pressure to adapt to male behaviour, e.g. at business lunches as well as **stress** and mental strain, it is more likely that these women take drugs

In the context of professional life, however, double burdens due to a woman's traditional role in a family with children can also have addictive effects. Today's construction of femininity is characterised by the participation of women in material and immaterial success. As a result, freedom and health-protecting qualities of women are lost. With the increasing equality of women in all areas of life, addiction has also spread among them. Today, women consume more substances than before and practice male forms of consumption. They are left to themselves and thus more often fall victim to drug addiction.

### Classical psychosocial risk factors for the female sex are the following:

- Having learned to deny their own needs and wishes in favour of others
- Understanding others
- Unpretentiousness and passivity with the consequences of a lack of experience or power

### Three pillars for being able to survive the social context without addiction

#### 1. A strong self

- Self-respect: Being in harmony with oneself.
- Ability to perform: How to implement what one set out to do.
- Self-distance: Please keep distance.
- Self-delusion: Put yourself in a mild light
- Talk to yourself: Listen to yourself more often

#### 2. Cope with everyday life

Hecticness, stress and long to-do lists! I do not know where I am coming or going! The danger of addiction is great. But it can be reduced if we teach ourselves in competences that help us cope with the completely normal chaos of everyday life.

- Stress competence: „I got this!“
- Conflict competence: Facing the problems.
- Decision making authority: Not too much at once!
- Media competence: Relaxed handling of new media.
- Time competence: Time is at my side.

#### 3. Withstanding

- Risk competence: Being able to live safely with uncertainty
- Retreat competence: Being alone as the key to self-knowledge
- Sceptical thinking: „Doubt is fertile „
- Assertiveness: Giving in is no solution!
- Emotional competence: the intelligent handling of emotions
- Self-protection: Leaving the habit spiral

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