

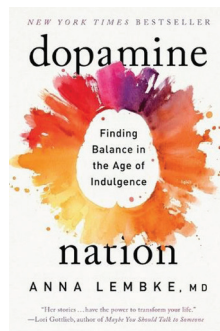


DOPAMINE NATION

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THE BOOK


**Dopamine Nation:
Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence**

By Anna Lembke



INTRODUCTION

Do you have a habit you want to stop? Is habit the right word, or is it really an addiction? In today's high-octane, stimulation-filled world, the number of addictions has become staggering. The easy availability of anything from prescription drugs to online shopping is making it harder to enjoy everyday life without seeking a hit of dopamine every few minutes. This is why Dopamine Nation is such an important read.

Anna Lembke, a professor of Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine and chief of the Stanford Addiction Medicine Dual Diagnosis Clinic, uses this book to explain the need for dopamine hits that everyone experiences and, more importantly, how to control it. With engaging anecdotes backed up with science, Dr Lembke tells how her patients overcame their addictions and how you can do the same. As you will discover in Dopamine Nation, there is no easy answer, but there are solutions that you can use to fight your own dopamine addiction.

NOTE: This book tackles some serious topics, but this summary is more focused on impulsive habits that are distracting when there is work to be done. It is important to speak with your GP if you feel as though areas of your life are out of control.



5 BEST QUOTES

“The paradox is that hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake, leads to anhedonia. Which is the inability to enjoy pleasure of any kind.”

“70% of the world global deaths are attributable to modifiable behavioural risk factors like smoking, physical inactivity and diet.

“I urge you to find a way to immerse yourself fully in the life that you've been given. To stop running from whatever you're trying to escape, and instead to stop, and turn, and face whatever it is. Then I dare you to walk toward it. In this way, the world may reveal itself to you as something magical and awe-inspiring that does not require escape. Instead, the world may become something worth paying attention to.

“But, there is a cost to medicating away every type of human suffering, and as we shall see, there is an alternative path that might work better: embracing pain.”

“We're all running from pain. Some of us take pills. Some of us couch surf while binge-watching Netflix. Some of us read romance novels. We'll do almost anything to distract ourselves from ourselves. Yet all this trying to insulate ourselves from pain seems only to have made our pain worse.”



7 BIG IDEAS

1. THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

Humans have always sought pleasure. It's only natural to do what you enjoy, seek pleasurable experiences and shun those you dislike. The problem is that pleasurable experiences are too readily available in the modern world, frequently without even leaving the house.

What you are seeking when you pursue addictive behaviour is a rush of the chemical dopamine in the brain.

Dopamine, in short, is a chemical that makes you feel good. While it has other functions in brain operation, the long and the short of it for these processes is that dopamine makes you feel good, and it is the basis for all addictive behaviours. When you smoke marijuana, it triggers dopamine. When you buy that new item on Amazon, it triggers dopamine. When you spin the roulette wheel, it triggers dopamine.

The problem is the brain likes to level things out. When you produce dopamine, it tips your brain toward pleasure and action. Your brain will then work to level by applying chemicals that weigh down the 'pain' side to bring you level. The more you seek dopamine, the more the brain works to move things back to level, and things go a little haywire, setting you to pain.

This is why addicts go into withdrawal. They need their drug of choice merely to reset their brain to level.

The fight is now to remove the additive stimulus and reset your brain so that your pleasure-pain balance is level without using your drug of choice to do this.

2. ABSTINENCE

The best method to break the cycle of chasing a dopamine hit on a habitual basis, Dr Lembke says, is abstinence. With the exception of serious drug addiction and alcoholism, where abstinence can cause severe medical complications, going without is the way to escape your dopamine-seeking behaviour.

Most addicts will say they need their drug to feel normal. What they are not realising is how true this is. The drug is now resetting the brain to level or close to it. It is not the high they enjoyed at first but merely getting back to baseline.

The irony is that baseline is where you would be without the drug. This is why the best thing to do is to quit cold turkey. Dr Lembke tells her patients to quit for one month and then come back and discuss how they are feeling.

Most patients suffer for a short period and then rapidly improve. If they do not improve, Dr Lembke assumes that something else is at play aside from the addiction and delves into further possibilities.



7 BIG IDEAS

3. SELF BINDING

Of course, going cold turkey is far easier said than done. This is where the process of self-binding comes in. Not as distressing as it sounds, all self-binding means is finding ways to remove your access to your drug of choice. For Dr Lembke, who found herself addicted to low-quality vampire fiction, getting rid of her Kindle was a start.

For a gambler, it might mean blacklisting yourself at local casinos. For an alcoholic, not having alcohol in the house. For a food addict, a lockable box with a timer.

Removed from the temptation, it is considerably easier to forget about your drug and become the person you want to be. As Lemke explains, "Binding ourselves is a way to be free."

4. HOMEOSTASIS

The technical term for that level state when your pleasure and pain are neutral is homeostasis.

One way to achieve homeostasis is to use medications. Antidepressants, for example, can level out someone's brain that is balanced too far towards pain.

The problem with medications is that they can take away highs as well as lows. You have to weigh the benefits of losing the lows against what you might be missing out on. Because medications level the balance, this can mean you miss out on pleasures. The things that once brought you joy can feel less entrancing. This can be difficult because life without pleasure can be very uninspiring. Why eat if you feel nothing? Why bother?

While this can be a risk for some medications, it is possible to get it right, so the time should always be taken to establish the best medications for you. This is Dr Lembke's advice but speak to your doctor for personalised recommendations.

5. PRESSING ON PAIN

Logically enough, just as when you weigh the side of pleasure, the balance shifts back towards pain; the converse is also true. This means that a little pain can be invigorating and give you the dopamine rush you are missing when you have broken your addiction.

This doesn't mean self-harm. This means something like the thrill of a cold shower or an ice bath. There is a reason there are so many Polar Bear groups that take swims in winter. The pain of an ice-cold dip will then shift towards pleasure, making you feel great afterwards.

Of course, like any dopamine rush, pain can become addictive, too. This is why some people exercise until they are unwell. Be aware of replacing one addiction with another and ensure the pain you use is harmless and in moderation.



7 BIG IDEAS

6. RADICAL HONESTY

Lambke advocates radical honesty at all times.

Lying, if not addictive, is at least habit-forming.

Dr Lembke writes, "My patients taught me that honesty enhances awareness, creates more satisfying relationships, holds us accountable to a more authentic narrative, and strengthens our ability to delay gratification. It may even prevent the future development of addiction."

Lying keeps you isolated as you live in a world of your own creation where no one really knows you or what you are doing. This isolation is often what drives people back to their drug of choice.

Being honest creates an air of trust as well as promoting accountability for your actions.

7. PROSOCIAL SHAME

Something that goes hand in hand with lying is shame.

Often, people lie exactly because they are ashamed. Addiction also leads to a host of acts for which it is only natural to be ashamed. If addiction didn't inevitably lead to shameful behaviour, then it would not be a problem.

Being shamed the right way, 'prosocial shame' can produce positive results.

This means swallowing your pride and allowing yourself to face prosocial shame by admitting the truth. This way, you can escape isolation by sharing your shameful experiences in a safe environment, like a support group. Then, you can experience acceptance, which allows you to break the cycle of isolation and addiction.

**3 ACTION STEPS****1. SEEK HELP**

Every example of addiction in Dopamine Nation is of someone who has sought help from a medical professional, psychologist or group.

There are very few success stories of people beating addiction on their own. The first step is always to seek help.

2. ABSTAIN

Unless it puts your life at risk, set yourself up to spend four weeks without your favoured addiction.

A month gives you enough time to detox and build new circuits in your brain. These will establish how the addiction is affecting you and what other issues may need to be addressed.

3. SELF-BIND

Find ways to remove yourself from temptation or to remove the temptation from yourself.

Disallowing and finding strategies to avoid your drug of choice is essential to staying strong and achieving your goals.

**1 KEY TAKEAWAY**

The key takeaway from Dopamine Nation is that life is best lived with balance.

Pleasure and pain are both necessary, and the incessant search for pleasure will ultimately only lead to more pain.

Rather than running away from the world, try immersing yourself in it instead.



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