



# Corey Haim's Death Highlights Difficulty of Addiction Recovery

## Beating Addiction an Unending Battle, Experts Say

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The death of 38-year-old actor [Corey Haim](#) by an alleged prescription drug overdose has cast renewed light on the question of whether an addict can truly "recover" -- particularly in light of accounts, including his Haim's, that he had [cleaned up](#) his life.

[Haim](#) was taken from his mother's North Hollywood home by ambulance to Burbank's Providence St. Joseph Medical Center early this morning, where he died at about 3:40 a.m. PT, according to police Sgt. Frank Albarran.

Haim struggled with cocaine and Valium addiction and reportedly was admitted to rehab more than 15 times.

"Addiction is a chronic disease, like diabetes, and unfortunately there is absolutely no guarantee that a person will be cured," said Mohamed Kabbaj, a neuroscientist at Florida State University. "Even if a person goes through rehab they will be faced with craving in certain situations and they can relapse anytime -- even after years of being sober."

Despite that, experts say the problems of [addiction](#) can be overcome with enough vigilance, especially when it is accompanied by outside support.

"Failure is always a possibility," said Richard Clayton, chair of health behavior at the University of Kentucky College of Public Health. "Those who continue to make serious efforts to get 'clean' should be congratulated each time they try, encouraged to keep being clean a serious goal, and genuinely supported in their efforts by those who love them."

Support and proper treatment are the most important elements of success, he said.

"Not many succeed without encouragement and support," said Clayton. "Some who succeed do so because of the encouragement and support they receive along with evidence-based treatment."

"Addiction can be put into remission through a number of effective programs, probably the best known and most successful of which is a 12-step program combined with some therapy," said Scott Basinger, a neuroscientist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas.

Haim's death was not the first [death of a celebrity](#) who many believed had cleaned up. Another example is celebrity DJ Adam Goldstein, also known as DJ AM, who had a variety of painkillers and anti-anxiety medications when he was found dead from an apparent accidental drug overdose in August. He had claimed

sobriety for 11 years.

## **The Myth of the Ex-Addict**

While many who have abused drugs and stopped may refer to themselves as "recovered" or "cured," doctors say may be abstention but the addiction itself has not vanished.

"There is no such a thing as 'ex-drug addict' label," said Kabbaj. "When you become addicted, you are addicted for life. You can only hope that you will stay sober for a very long time."

Part of the problem with relapses is a logistical one.

"Treatment does work," said Clayton. "Unfortunately, there are not nearly enough treatment programs available or slots in them to make a big dent in the lives of addicts in the U.S."

Basinger said this lack of availability is the result of a problem with funding priorities.

"We need to re-focus our efforts in the 'drug war,'" he said. "We waste billions with ineffective attempts at interdiction, money that could be used for prevention, education and treatment. Additionally, we need to re-structure our criminal justice system to get addicts help rather than incarceration. More drug courts and rehabilitation programs are critically needed."

Expanding such programs also may be critical because of the time needed to fully aid an addict who wants to recover.

"The tragic death of the young actor, Corey Haim, reminds us that drug dependence is a chronic, relapsing illness," said Dr. Eden Evins, director of the Center for Addiction Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. "Relapse is common, even the norm. Relapse is usually preceded by strong drug craving that is triggered by stress, small doses of the drug, or exposure to others using drugs or to situations that remind the person of previous use. It is for this reason that treatment that is extensive is much more effective than intensive treatment that is of short duration."

Unfortunately, even people who are able to get addiction treatment face an obstacle that does not relent, even if their own motivation does.

"Relapses do occur, even after an individual has demonstrated significant determination and commitment to change," said Thomas Irwin, program director of the McLean Center at Fernside in Princeton, Mass.

"Relapses can occur after years or even decades of being abstinent from alcohol and drugs. Motivation and confidence to remain committed to change is not as stable as most would like it to be, including those with addictive disorders and their family and friends."

*ABC News' Kate McCarthy contributed to this report.*

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