

THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

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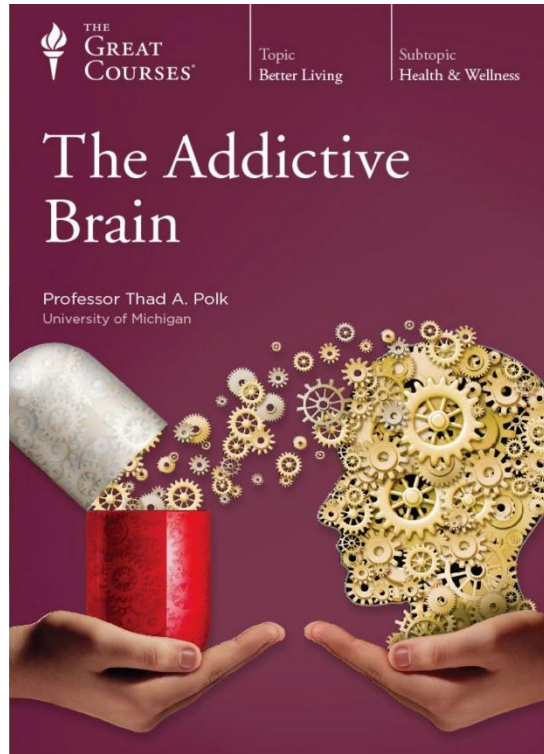
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Film Series

The Addictive Brain

August 9, 2026

1:00 PM at 113 East 30th Street



The prefrontal cortex is the brain's primary defense against addiction. *The Addictive Brain* does not discuss meditation and mindfulness practices, but they are known to strengthen the prefrontal cortex. This course provides a deep dive into the neuroscience of addiction.

1. **Addiction 101**– Learn how “addiction” is diagnosed based on characteristics such as abuse, dependence, and craving. Professor Polk surveys the history of drug use, from ancient history through the development of synthetics in the 19th and 20th centuries. Finally, he reviews government regulation and the substantial costs of drug abuse, both to the individual and to society.
2. **The Psychology and Neuroscience of Reward** – Explore the brain's mechanisms for learning from reinforcement. You'll start with the psychological aspects, discovering the way humans learn by a series of trials and rewards. Then you'll find out what parts of the brain process pleasure, self-control, and craving, and see how the psychology and neuroscience of reward processing converge.
3. **How Addiction Hijacks the Brain** – Here you'll examine the ways addiction alters the brain by numbing the pleasure center, sensitizing the dopamine system, and inhibiting the prefrontal cortex. Combined, these altered brain functions lead to strong cravings and a reduced ability to control one's actions. This foray into neuroscience will forever change the way you think about addiction.
4. **Genetics – Born to Be an Addict?** – Investigate how people may be susceptible to addiction on a genetic level. Thanks to studies of twins and DNA analysis, scientists are homing in on the genes that predispose us toward addiction. While there is no single “addiction gene,” our DNA can significantly influence whether we become addicts.

© 2015 The Great Courses. The four modules will take approximately 100 Minutes. To be screened at 1:00 PM on Sunday, August 9, courtesy of The Great Courses. Take the #6 train to 28th Street. 113 East 30th St. is between Park and Lexington.

Admission is free.