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Mirapex and One Woman's Addiction

January 15, 2006, 12:00:00AM. By Jane Mundy

Deidra Flower, age 45, lives just outside Dallas, Texas with her husband and two kids. Her whole life turned around in just 15 minutes, back in September 2003, when she walked out of her doctor's office diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and a prescription for Mirapex..

"I should have researched what was going into my body," says Deidra. "My doctor gave me lots of information on the disease but not on the drugs I was taking."

The first side effects were manageable, compared to what was in store. Deidra was "sick as a dog", and lost 12 lbs. Now at a mere 94 lbs, she looked like a skeleton. She couldn't eat, even the smell of food made her nauseous. "My doctor said it was a perfectly common side effect and I would work through it," Deidra says. "It took me a year to get 10 lbs back." But soon, her concern over weight would be the last thing on her mind.

Deidra was president of a family company: her father was the owner and her husband Doug (not his real name) also worked for the company. Deidra and Doug frequently traveled to medical trade shows. The trade shows took them to New Orleans, Las Vegas, places where there were casinos.

"I lived in the casino, and had never done that in my life," says Deidra. "At 4 a.m. my husband would come looking for me and tell me I had to work in three hours, and I still wouldn't leave... He was so pissed off at me. I would sit in front of the slots for 10 hrs at a time." Doug would later tell Deidra that she wasn't even having fun." I don't know if I was having fun or not. I just remember not being able to get up from the seat."

Deidra thought about her new obsession with gambling; she thought it was because she now had the opportunity. But that wasn't true, because there was a casino close to home and she had never gone there — not before taking Mirapex.

"One year ago I started sneaking off; I told my husband I was going shopping. He finally figured out where I was and he would drag me out of the casino at 2 a.m," says Deidra.

"Right after Christmas holidays, was the first day we were supposed to go back to work. I had been internet gambling at work, using the company's business account. I thought that, if I hit one big slot [machine], I could win all this money back for the company... instead I just dug myself into a deeper hole." She arrived at work, then promptly turned the car around and drove to the closest casino.

Doug finally told his father-in-law about her addiction. They pulled the company records and found that she had spent over \$60,000.

When confronted, Deidra just cried uncontrollably. "I thought it was something I was taking," she says."I went online, typed in Mirapex and saw the link [to gambling]. I woke up my husband and said I know what is wrong with me." By this time she was hysterical. And furious. She called the Parkinson's Disease clinic and told the specialist's assistant that she wasn't taking any more Mirapex.

"His assistant said to me, 'Honey you aren't the first, don't feel guilty, *this is happening to a lot of others* and then, when I spoke to the Parkinson's specialist and told him what had happened to me, he suggested getting involved in a class action lawsuit."

She was also obsessed with sex.

"It was another compulsion that I couldn't control," says Deidra. "Before Mirapex, I never initiated sex and then I couldn't get enough (Doug wasn't complaining). So now that I am off it, my sexual needs may slow down."

Deidra has been off Mirapex for nine days. The Parkinson's tremors are worse but she is "out of the fog." In two weeks, when the Mirapex is out of her system, Deidra's doctor will prescribe something else to combat the tremors.

Meanwhile, Mirapex has cost Deidra her job, destroyed her family and just about ruined her life. "My father won't speak to me and we have lost our stock in the company that took 10 years to build. My husband had over \$200,000 invested and he will never see a dime of it. We are now unemployed. We spent this past Christmas in hell — he is afraid to leave me because I have been suicidal. I am not exaggerating, I haven't even wanted to get up. I just thank God my husband has supported me through every bit of it."

If he hadn't, Deidra might not be here to tell her story.

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Posted by
lisa
on May 8, 2015

Now I have been weaning off it. It was pure hell! My doctor put me on vicodin to get threw it or i don't know if I would be here. My pare9and God helped me!

Posted by
lisa
on April 22, 2015

I was on it for 9 years. My life was a complete hell but did not know it was the mirapex. I just thought I was a looser who could not cope w anything. I got a divorce, gained 70 pounds, lost every job,could not function, anxiety, depression, I got dui,was in rehab for depression and alcohol. Spending sprees,went threw 5 boyfriends, lost house!

Posted by
Rosey
on October 27, 2014

Wow, I can't believe what I'm reading. My story is identical to yours in so many ways. I was prescribed this drug in 2003 for Restless Leg Syndrome and had never heard of these side effects. Like you, I never gambled before Mirapex. Unless you are afflicted with this extremely tormenting condition (RLS), it's hard to understand. I tried several medications and the Mirapex (Pramipexole is the generic) is the only one that worked. I did suffer from strange nightmares in the beginning but that stopped over time and so did the restless legs. I felt like a normal person again thanks to the Mirapex until all hell broke loose when my husband took me to a casino for the first time just for fun and dinner. Having never played slot machines I wasn't certain where to begin. I found out quickly and was hooked. I started lying about where I was going, borrowing money from any place that would give me a loan, pawning anything the pawn shops would take, and then I would drive to a casino. I would sit and play slot machines for as long as I could. There were times I didn't get out of my chair for 6 or 7 hours. I never drank, ate or went to the ladies room. You would think that winning a sizeable amount would make me stop but no, I just kept pouring the money right back into the machines. I was spending every dime we had but that was ok because the BIG WIN was right around the next bend and I could pay everything back and hopefully have some money left over. That didn't happen and I became frantic so I pawned my very expensive diamond wedding ring hoping my husband of 10 years wouldn't notice. With money in hand I headed back to the casino never doubting for a minute that I wouldn't win enough to pick up my ring and pay off some loans I had taken out. No big winnings. I had to go home penniless and without my ring. I would sit in my car a few blocks from home wondering how this happened to me and where else could I get some money so I could go back and gamble some more. I guess I just never learned. The more I played, the more I lost. I exhausted every payday loan company and even started borrowing from loan companies on the internet. I rationalized that the next trip to the casino would be the profitable one and all my worries would be over. Never happened. I just kept losing and digging my own grave. I also considered suicide on more than one occasion. I looked into Gamblers Anonymous meetings but there wasn't a chapter in my area. I would just look in the mirror and say "What the hell happened to you, what have you become and how did this happen." I was on the verge of a divorce, I lost my job because of too many no shows claiming I was sick and I didn't have a penny to my name. That's when I saw an article somewhere about the side effects of Mirapex; one of them was compulsive gambling. I couldn't believe what I was reading about this drug. I wasn't crazy, I was being poisoned! My life had gone to hell. I was suffering from severe depression. My compulsive behavior didn't stop at gambling. I also became a binge eater sometimes getting up in the middle of the night and eating anything in sight. Another compulsion I developed while on the Mirapex was a shopping addiction. When I had money that I didn't put into the slot machines I went shopping. I spent money on things I didn't need but it made me feel good to buy them. I lost almost all of my friends because I never saw them. My entire focus was gambling. I mentioned losing my job - that was due to not showing up because I was at the casino. I feel every bit of your pain and my heart goes out to you. I can see now what happened to me. The Mirapex made me crazy. Another thing I experienced was short term memory loss. I believe all of these are side effects of this destructive medicine. My doctor put me on a couple different medicines but so far nothing has worked. Like you I gave up and started taking the Mirapex again because it was the only way I got relief. I was sleeping again at last. However the gambling started all over again. My life is in the gutter with no one and no where to go. My family has given up on me, my husband has left me and I'm down to my last dollar. I started shop lifting just to survive and now I am facing theft charges. I wish there was a way to turn back time. I have contemplated suicide as an easy out! How in the world can a medication still be on the market when this is the result? The pharmaceutical company should be sued for what they've done to innocent people who have lost everything and everyone. Good luck to all of you Mirapex victims. I'm right there with you.

Posted by
Margaret A O'Donnell
on October 26, 2014

My story is almost identical to Deidre's. I am a 64 year old female who never gambled a day in my life. My doctor prescribed Mirapex for RLS (Restless Leg Syndrome). At first I thought it was a miracle drug because I no longer had the RLS. Little did I know that this medication would completely ruin my life. I was never told of the side effects associated with the medicine. My dosage was increased a few times as the RLS started to creep back into my life (and my legs)... I was on a very high dose when I discovered slot machines in 2010. My new husband and I live 30 minutes from a casino. I started going every chance I got. When my retirement check ran out, I discovered pay day loans. There were times when I had 10 pay day loans out at a time. I would borrow what I could, play the slots, hopefully win so I could pay back the loan. This became a vicious cycle over the past 4 1/2 years. Like Deidre, I just kept digging a deeper hole. Today I am facing criminal charges for "borrowing" some items that didn't belong to me and taking them to a pawn shop for a loan so I could play the slot machines. Of course I didn't win and could not retrieve the items before they were discovered missing. I was arrested, booked and am now facing prosecution on felony charges all for a \$300 loan to play the slot machines hoping for the "big win" so I could pay back thousands of dollars in pay day loans. I've lost just about everything and everyone I love because of Mirapex and its generic Pramipex. My life,as I once knew it is over. I feel hopeless, helpless and worthless. Of course when you try and tell people that a drug caused the gambling addiction, they look at you like you are crazy (even though the pharmaceutical company is now required to list gambling addiction as one of the side effects of the medication). I just found out about this side effect recently and went off the medication under a doctor's supervision. I was given another medication for the RLS. I noticed the difference within 10 days - I felt so good and no more compulsive gambling.



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Unfortunately it didn't last. The RLS returned with a vengeance. I went back to the doctor and was given yet another drug to try. It didn't work either and I was desperate. I couldn't sleep so I spent my nights pacing the floor and stretching my legs, arms and torso. I was a mess and called my doctor again and was given another combination of medicines to reduce the symptoms. Nothing worked and I was a complete basket case. Out of sheer desperation I started taking the Mirapex again and the restless legs stopped and I finally was able to sleep. The thought of playing the slot machines was so enticing but I had promised my husband NO MORE SLOT MACHINES! I met a lady who loved to gamble and she talked me into going to the casino with her (it didn't take much convincing). I figured it was safe because I had no money until my friend loaned me some. I won instantly and paid her back with money to spare. And now we're back at the beginning. I put every cent back into the slot machines and then she wrote checks to the casino for me so I could play. I could feel the big win right at my finger tips. Nope - no winning, just losing so I hit the pay day loans yet again. I borrowed from every one in town, went to the casino and just kept losing. Today I'm in so much debt which I can't pay back, my bank account is in the negative, collection agents are calling me non-stop and I'm facing felony theft charges. My life is a disaster. I've contemplated suicide but having been raised Catholic, I just can't do it. Where do I go from here? I'm already living in hell! I've stopped the Mirapex again and this time, regardless of how awful the RLS is, I will not take any more of that destructive and devastating drug. My life is over. Any suggestions?

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