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Gucci Mane: The Road to Recovery and Success

By Sara Schapmann

Gucci Mane is riding high these days on the success of 12 studio albums, a new autobiography and the creation of his own record label. But for years the American rapper was lost in a different kind of high; one that cost him around \$500 a day and contributed to a downward spiral that landed him a three-year prison sentence.





Here's how a reckless, addicted Gucci Mane became the "sober, more conscious Gucci" of today, as he described himself in an [interview](#) with The FADER music magazine.

Addicted Gucci Mane: How He Got There

At the height of his addiction, Gucci Mane (birth name: Radric Delantic Davis) tells REVOLT TV he was smoking weed and drinking "lean" from the time he woke up until he went to bed every day. Lean is slang for a drink made from pop soda, hard candy, and prescription cough syrup containing codeine and promethazine. "I was drinking pints of lean a week and smoking pounds of weed and just doing all kinds of drugs," he said. "The whole way I was handling myself before I went to jail was just so negative [and] it showed in my body." He says this continued for about six or seven years.

Gucci had issues before that though. While it's difficult to know exactly why people get addicted to drugs and alcohol, from what is known about these problems, in Gucci's case, the stars may have been aligned to create a situation ripe for substance abuse.

Here are a few of the circumstances that may have come into play:

Trauma

Gucci told interviewers on ESPN's *Highly Questionable* talk television show that he suffered from PTSD because of his involvement in the May 10, 2005 murder of rapper Henry Lee Clark, III. Gucci says he shot Clark in self-defense when Clark tried to assault and rob him along with three other assailants. It wasn't Gucci's first brush with violence. He was robbed at gunpoint at age 15 and watched a friend almost beaten to death in a gang feud as a young adult, just to name a couple instances. "I done had a history of violence, a history of just erratic behavior," Gucci told The FADER. "I had a history of drug abuse and drug addiction. All of it ties [together]. It's just a spiral of destructive behavior." Indeed, a large body of [research](#) links trauma and PTSD with substance abuse.

Complicated family

Gucci's parents had a strained relationship. He spent a lot of time with his grandmother because his mother was attending school and trying to make ends meet as a single parent. They moved a lot. His father was absent most of his childhood, and like Gucci, dealt drugs for money. Though his dad would visit from time to time, Gucci's relationship with him eventually fizzled when his father had two children with another woman and they took priority. Albeit controversial, some [research](#) suggests that in some situations, like when there is also an unstable home environment, absent fathers during childhood and adolescence can negatively impact social-emotional development, which may contribute to some mental health issues and unhealthy behaviors.

Early exposure to drugs

In an [interview](#) with Alisa Chane on NPR's *All Things Considered*, Gucci discussed dealing drugs at age 13 and using drugs as a teenager. Once he was addicted, Gucci Mane's appetite for different substances grew, eventually leading to a steady diet of lean and marijuana. Some research has found early exposure to drugs can prime people for substance abuse problems as adults. One [study](#) that followed 1,037 participants for 30 years found that about half of adolescents exposed to illicit drugs and alcohol before age 15 were at higher risk for a number of negative outcomes, including substance abuse.

Stress

People Music [reports](#) Gucci also cites the constant stress and pressures of the music industry and his growing paranoia from drug abuse as contributors to his addiction. He would cope with chronic stress by doing more drugs and drinking more alcohol, which added to his paranoia and other problems. [Stress](#) is a known risk factor for substance abuse, especially when paired with a co-occurring mental health disorder or trauma.

The underlying reasons behind addictions and the [turning points](#) that motivate people to change are different for everyone. The important thing is that those turning points happen before it's too late. In ESPN's *Highly Questionable* interview, Gucci said that he was "100 percent" surprised that his alcohol and drug abuse didn't kill him.



Sober Gucci Mane: How He Did It

With a rap sheet tallying 10 arrests between 2001 and 2012 including assault and drug and weapon charges, Gucci wasn't new to the legal system. But it was his almost three-year stint in a maximum security prison for convictions of firearm possession by a convicted felon, carrying a concealed weapon, disorderly conduct and marijuana possession that was the first step in his sobriety.

"It was a vicious cycle that kept repeating itself until this last time," he said in an [interview](#) with Trevor Noah of The Daily Show. "I think it was the consequences, and once my consequences got dire, when I was facing like 20, 30, 40 years [in prison], it forced me to be like, 'you know that's it. I'm changing my lifestyle. I'm changing my choices.'"

Detox

Whether he wanted to or not, Gucci was forced to detox in prison. It wasn't the medically monitored kind of detox with prescribed medications to ease withdrawal symptoms and constant oversight from medical staff that happens in drug rehab. Because he was incarcerated and addicted, Gucci Mane went through "cold turkey" detox, a fate many people face when they enter into prison with a drug or alcohol use disorder.

In the ESPN *Highly Questionable* interview Gucci says of his drug detox, "Drying out from drinking lean is probably one of the worst feelings in the world. It tears your body down. It tears your mind down. When you been doing something for so long, it's kinda like food. [Detoxing] was like starving."

Self-help

With a lot of free time on his hands and no access to therapy or support groups, Gucci took to reading in an effort to learn about his issues and to better himself. He says he mainly read self-help books, biographies and inspirational books from authors such as Deepak Chopra, Malcolm Gladwell, Tony Robbins and James Allen as well as the biographies of Jimi Hendrix and Pimp C. and Mike Tyson's autobiography.

Healthy lifestyle


Lean is packed with calories from sugar. When he was addicted, Gucci Mane wasn't putting self-care at the top of his list of priorities, which is typical for people with drug and alcohol addiction. Gucci started working out in the prison gym and running the stairs. He also began eating better. He dropped almost 70 pounds while incarcerated.


When he emerged from prison sober and clear-headed, the change was so astounding that social media flooded with rumors that it was actually a clone of the infamous rapper. It wasn't a clone. It was a new and improved Gucci Mane, who went through a lot to make it happen.

Today, Gucci continues to work hard at his revamped sober lifestyle. He told [Real92.3 radio](#) that keeping friends around him who know not to tempt him helps him stay sober. He also attributes some of his success in sobriety to plain "cockiness." Instead of pouring himself a glass of lean, he pours himself into his craft. Gucci's lyrics regularly touch on subjects like substance abuse, mental illness and trauma.

He told *Vogue Magazine* he works out an hour and a half a day, six days a week. He says that working out humbles him. Gucci's traded in "lean" for water, and marijuana munchies for a diet packed with vegetables, fruit and protein. "I used to live a life of excess, greed and gluttony. Now I've learned to challenge myself — to get up every day and push myself to live a healthier lifestyle," he says.

By Sara Schapmann

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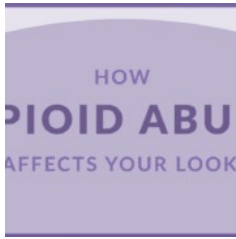
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