



While studying at the university, Sigmund Freud became friends with an older student - Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow - who worked with him in the laboratory. One day, Ernst cut his thumb while dissecting a cadaver. Because of bacteria which entered his wound, Fleischl ultimately lost his thumb. It had to be amputated.

Later, when Freud discovered cocaine, he thought it could be used as a remedy for all kinds of problems. He also thought it could help his friend, Ernst, who still had severe pain in his hand.

We learn more from Catherine Reef in her book, *Sigmund Freud: Pioneer of the Mind*:

But with the loss of his thumb, Fleischl's troubles only worsened. He needed further operations to remove neuromas, which were painful lumps of nerve tissue that formed beneath the skin. The infection lingered despite all the surgery, and the hand ached constantly. At times it hurt so much that Fleischl thought about suicide. He started taking morphine, a drug made from opium, to relieve his pain, but he soon became addicted to it. Freud suspected that if Fleischl took cocaine instead of morphine, he could get pain relief and break his addiction.

Things, unfortunately, did not work out that way. At the time, physicians and scientists did not understand cocaine's addictive power and side-effects. Reef continues:

For a short while, Fleischl thought that his friend had solved his problems. The cocaine stopped the pain and eased his craving for morphine. Unfortunately, Fleischl and Freud were ignorant of a fact that is widely known today: Although cocaine use does not lead to physical addiction, people can become psychologically dependent on the drug. Within days, Fleischl was consuming larger doses of cocaine, more and more often. He took so much that he started to hallucinate. Terrified, he thought that snakes were slithering over his body.

Although he tried to nurse his friend through the effects of cocaine poisoning, Freud could not help him break the cocaine dependency. The episode caused Freud to completely change his views on cocaine:

*After witnessing the suffering that he had caused his friend, Freud deeply regretted his championing of cocaine. He reproached himself for urging the drug on his loved ones and for singing its praises in print. (*Sigmund Freud: Pioneer of the Mind*, by Catherine Reef, pages 41-42.)*

Credits:

Image of Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Quoted passage from *Sigmund Freud: Pioneer of the Mind*, by Catherine Reef, pages 41-42. Online, courtesy

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Ernst-von-Fleishl-Early-Cocaine-Addict1>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Ernst-von-Fleishl-Early-Cocaine-Addict1>

Media Stream



Ernst von Fleishl - Early Cocaine Addict

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>