

### Family History of Dependency

It is strongly believed that there are genetic factors that make people advance easily and quickly into neurochemical and organic dependency.

### High Stress Occupations

As stated before, stress is usually the igniter of the progression of dependency.

### Traumatic Events

People who have experienced trauma are susceptible to using/drinking to dull the emotional and psychological pain resulting from events such as assault, rape, murder, armed robbery, domestic violence, etc.

### Emotional Problems

People who have mental health problems such as depression, panic attacks, anxiety disorders, and even schizophrenia may use alcohol/drugs to self-medicate their psychiatric symptoms. People suffering loss of loved ones also may self-medicate.

### Chronic Pain

People who have chronic pain like arthritis, back problems, migraines, etc., often have had to use addicting pain pills for a period of time and can develop dependency. Some may use the legal non-prescriptive drug – alcohol – to ease their pain.

As you can see, all of these vulnerability factors involve social, emotional, or physical discomfort.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You have to be honest with yourself. Did you relate to any of the signs or vulnerability factors? Imagining a red flag after each item you related to, if the pages look unduly red, you may have a problem. If you have only a few, you may be vulnerable or in the early stages of a problem. Do you recognize a family member with these problems? The best time to consult with a professional about drug/alcohol use is when the page doesn't look too red. It is NEVER too late however, to seek help for a problem. There are different types of programs available to deal with alcohol and drug problems and most are on an outpatient basis. The first step is to talk about the problem with a person trained to assess your situation.

# ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE

USE

ABUSE

DEPENDENCY

PHYSICAL  
ADDICTION

**Think Health. Act Now!** City of Milwaukee Health Dept.

## INTRODUCTION

Alcohol and drug abuse is a major problem in our country. It leads to broken families, numerous health problems, lost jobs, poor job performance, family/marital problems, child/spousal abuse, suicides, and death. According to recent reports, at least 20% of the population in the United States suffers from some form of alcohol/drug abuse. It is also conservatively estimated that one alcohol/drug abuser affects at least five other people.

The purpose of this information is to help people better understand alcohol and drug problems and seek help in the early stages of the illness, when it is easier to treat and there are less disastrous effects. This information is also intended to help prevent individuals from developing an alcohol/drug problem.

Many people believe stating someone has an 'alcohol' and a 'drug problem' is being redundant. In many ways they are correct, because alcohol *is* a drug. So, we are really talking about drugs here, or what is often called substance abuse.

Before we go further, let us categorize some of the more common drugs of abuse.

## CATEGORIES OF DRUGS

Drugs of abuse can be classified in three general categories: depressants, stimulants, and hallucinogens.

### Depressant drugs

produce a calming effect and slow down the central nervous system (CNS). For this reason, some depressants are called sedatives. Depressant drugs include: alcohol, tranquilizers (valium, xanax, ativan), barbituates, and opiates/opioids (heroin, percodan, vicodin, opium, oxycontin).

### Stimulant drugs

speed up the central nervous system (CNS) and excite functional activity in the body. Stimulant drugs include cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy, methamphetamine, nicotine and caffeine.

### Hallucinogenic drugs

alter and distort concepts of reality. For example, one may see or hear things that are not there or one might see music and hear colors. Depth perception and sense of time and space may be distorted. Some examples of hallucinogenic drugs are LSD, acid, PCP, marijuana, mescaline and peyote.

As you can see, different drugs do different things, but there are some effects that are common to all drugs and these are: ***all drugs change the way you feel, all can be used to escape unwanted feelings, and all have the potential to cause dependency.***

## PROGRESSION OF DEPENDENCY

Drug dependency does not happen overnight. Dependency takes time and is quicker with some drugs, but all drug dependencies involve a progression. There is a starting point that advances from use → to abuse → to dependency → and then to physical addiction.

### USE

#### Moderate/Social Use

This is use that is done in a temperate and social way. It is not done to escape reality or uncomfortableness. Moderate or social use does not cause problems.

#### Occasional Stress Relief Use

This is not necessarily indicative of a problem, if done occasionally and in an appropriate manner; however, occasional stress relief use can be the start of a problem.

### ABUSE

#### Increased Stress Relief Use

This is the point where use becomes abuse/misuse. The frequency of relieving some type of stress with a drug increases. Previous stressors intensify. The drug abuse begins to cause more problems that in turn increases stress, which leads to more drug use. In this stage, emotional and psychological dependency begin. The drug use/drinking is now a problem.

### DEPENDENCY

#### Emotional/Psychological Dependency

The individual now needs the drug to relieve stress on a regular basis. Without regular use, one becomes increasingly agitated, depressed, and anxious. The mind adjusts to the drug and now needs it to maintain a comfortable mental state. As the mind becomes more dependent on the drug, the body begins to adjust, particularly the brain. The brain's neurochemistry begins to alter and adjust to the action of the drug. At this stage, the body also begins to develop a tolerance to the drug, making the person need more of the drug to produce the desired effect.

### PHYSICAL ADDICTION

#### Neurochemical Dependency

At this stage, the brain's chemistry adjusts to the drug and now needs it to maintain a comfortable mental and physical state. This induces craving for the drug simply to satisfy the brain alteration. The psychological and emotional dependency compounds this brain chemical craving and makes the desire – the need for the drug – overwhelming.

#### Organic Dependency

The continued, frequent, and excessive use of the drug makes the major organs of the body adjust to it and become physically dependent (addicted). By organic we mean the heart, lungs, liver; the whole body becomes dependent on the action of the drug. At this stage, the body itself needs the drug to maintain a comfortable physical and mental state. Not having the drug would induce an extreme reaction that is called withdrawal – the body literally needs the drug.

The time it takes for drug use to evolve from moderate/social use to organic dependency varies on the individual and the drug. Alcohol may take years; cocaine may take only months to bring someone to bottomed-out dependency; still all drug dependency cases exhibit progression. It is our hope that people will come to terms with their use well before the later stages.

The following are signs that indicate a person may have drug abuse problems. Remember alcohol also *is* a drug.

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## SIGNS OF DEPENDENCY

### Stress Relief Use

Using/drinking to deal with stress and problems.

### Blackouts

Blackouts mostly occur with alcohol and it is when one does not remember significant events that occurred when drinking. It is a memory lapse that could be one hour, one day, or in some extreme cases, a week or more.

### Guilt/Remorse

Bad feelings about things that resulted from using/drinking too much, such as: what one may have done, the amount of money spent, how late one came home, etc.

### Lack of Control

This is the inability to predict the consequences of taking one drink, one pill, one hit, etc., with any degree of accuracy; or using/drinking past one's intention.

### Personality Changes

Becoming a different person while under the influence, often aggressive, belligerent or hostile.

### Attempts to Control

Setting limits, (usually to please someone else). May be successful for a period of time, but eventually the same pattern of out-of-control behavior returns.

### Family Problems/Concern

Causing family problems; having people express concerns about one's using/drinking. Children start having behavioral problems; spouses may become depressed and angry.

### Work/Legal Problems

Drinking/using affects work attendance, performance, punctuality, consistency, and behavior. Trouble with the law may occur, such as drunk driving, disorderly conduct, possession of illicit drugs, dealing, etc.

### Binges

Extended bouts of using/drinking. Binges can last a whole day, a weekend, or longer.

### Increase in Tolerance

Adapting to the drug/alcohol, requiring larger quantities to attain the desired effect.

### Drinking Despite Adverse Consequences

It is a major indication of a problem when somebody drinks/uses in light of continual negative experiences. Constantly getting in trouble at work, at home or with the law, and continuing use is a strong sign that it is out of control. Using/drinking despite strong medical advice not to, high blood pressure, heart problems, liver problems, ulcers etc., is a strong indicator that the use is out of control.

### Shakes/Tremors

As a result of physical addiction, withdrawal appears in the form of shakes, tremors and extreme nervousness when the drug is not present sufficiently in the body.

## VULNERABILITY AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO DEPENDENCY

### Low Threshold for Distress

People who have difficulty dealing with stress are prime candidates for drug problems because they can use drugs to calm themselves and are therefore more susceptible to developing dependency.

### Peer Group Pressure

People can be drawn into using/drinking under pressure to be part of the crowd, and to fit in. This is particularly true with teenagers, but can also happen to adults in work groups or social circles.

### Role Models

By example of using/drinking, a person who is a role model – one who is looked up to – may impress upon others that it is 'cool' to do so. Parents and authority figures, like coaches, teachers, police officers, and older siblings wield a heavy influence on a youth's decision on using/drinking.

### Family Dysfunction

People who come from families where there is an alcohol/drug problem have a 300 to 400% better chance of becoming dependent themselves. High rates have also been found in people who come from families where there is mental illness or physical/sexual abuse.