

*For our students experiencing substance use disorders:*



## What is a substance use disorder?

Different substances affect the brain in different ways. People may use substances such as alcohol, or other drugs to feel the pleasurable effects. At times, young people may experiment a few times with a substance. However, some continue and a pattern may develop that turns into heavier usage or addiction. It is important to understand that as young people's brains develop, substance use can potentially harm their development and mental health.

Some of the substances used by today's youth are alcohol, marijuana, opioids, over the counter pharmaceuticals, cocaine, amphetamines, hallucinogens (LSD, mushrooms), ecstasy, inhalants, and tobacco.

## Why do people keep using?

Substance use can be hard to change. One thing that makes change so difficult is that the immediate effect of substance use tends to be positive. The person may feel good, have more confidence and forget about his or her problems. The problems caused by substance use might not be obvious for some time.

The person may come to rely on substances to bring short-term relief from difficult or painful feelings. The effects of substances can make problems seem less important, or make it easier to interact with others. The person may come to believe that he or she cannot function or make it through the day without drugs. When the person uses substances to escape or change how he or she feels, using can become a habit, which can be hard to break.

Continued substance use, especially heavy use, can cause changes in the body and brain. A person who develops physical dependence and then stops using may experience distressing symptoms of withdrawal. Changes to the brain may be lasting. These changes may explain why people continue to crave the substance long after they have stopped using, and why they may slip back into using.

## Signs & symptoms of substance use disorder

There are two important signs that a person's substance use is risky, or already a problem. These are: harmful consequences and loss of control.

# Harmful consequences

The harms of substance use can range from mild (e.g., feeling hungover, being late for work) to severe (e.g., homelessness, disease). While each time a person uses a substance may seem to have little impact, the harmful consequences can build up over time. If a person continues to use substances despite the harmful consequences, he or she may have a substance use problem.

The harms of substance use can affect every aspect of a person's life. They include:

- injuries while under the influence
- feelings of anxiety, irritability or depression
- trouble thinking clearly
- blackouts
- problems with relationships
- spending money on substances rather than on food, rent or other essentials
- legal problems related to substance use
- loss of hope, feelings of emptiness.

## Loss of control

Some people may be aware that their substance use causes problems but continue to use, even when they want to stop. They may use more than they intended, or in situations where they didn't want to use. Some people may not see that their substance use is out of control and is causing problems. This is often referred to as being in denial. This so-called denial, however, may simply be a lack of awareness or insight into the situation. Whether people realize it or not, lack of control is another sign that substance use is a problem.

## Treatment for Substance Use Disorder

There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to addiction treatment. Choosing the appropriate treatment depends on the severity and type of addiction; the support available from family, friends and others; and the person's motivation to change.

### Self-change

Some people with substance use problems can make changes on their own using self-help materials (e.g., self-help books and websites).

### Self-help groups

Self-help groups, also called mutual aid groups, support people who are working to change their substance use. Many people participate in a self-help group while they are in formal treatment. The oldest and largest self-help organization is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Today, there are many self-help groups with various philosophies and approaches for people with substance use problems.

### Harm reduction

To reach out to people who may not be ready, willing or able to give up substances, some treatment programs have adopted a harm reduction approach.

Examples of harm reduction strategies include:

- helping people learn safer ways to use substance

- helping people learn how to recognize the signs of an overdose
- providing clean needles and other injection equipment (“works”) for injection drug use (to reduce transmission of infections such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C through needle sharing)
- helping to ensure that people’s basic needs, such as for food, shelter and medical care, are met
- substituting a safer drug for the one a person is using (e.g., substituting methadone for heroin)

## **Counseling**

Counseling comes in a variety of forms, including individual, group, couples and family therapy. Counseling generally aims to:

- increase people’s awareness of how substance use affects their lives, what puts them at risk of substance use and how to reduce substance use
- help people examine their thoughts and emotions and learn how these inner experiences affect how they behave, how they interact with others and how others see them
- promote physical, emotional and spiritual wellness, e.g., by helping people learn to:
- manage cravings and temptations to use substances
- meet their needs through assertive communication
- develop a healthy lifestyle
- find ways to meet people and form relationships that aren’t focused on substance use
- reduce stress.

## **Alcohol and other drug education**

Learning about the effects of alcohol and other drugs can help prepare people to make informed choices. Some treatment programs also offer alcohol and other drug education to family members.

## **Medication**

Medications used to help treat addictions include:

- nicotine patch, gum or an inhaler, or taking the medication bupropion (Zyban) (for smoking cessation)
- methadone or buprenorphine (for people who are dependent on heroin or other opioids, (pain medications such as codeine, Percodan, OxyContin)
- Medications for co-occurring depression may also be utilized

Medications to treat other types of addiction are limited. One is naltrexone (Revia), which can reduce cravings to drink in people who are alcohol dependent. Naltrexone can also be used to block the effects of opioids. Another medication used to treat alcohol dependence is disulfiram (Antabuse), which causes people to feel sick and nauseous if they drink alcohol.

## **Withdrawal management**

People sometimes need short-term help dealing with substance use withdrawal. Withdrawal management helps them manage symptoms that happen when they stop using the substance. It helps prepare clients for long-term treatment. Clients also learn about substance use and treatment options.

## **A holistic approach to treatment**

Many treatment programs offer a variety of other supports and services, including information and counselling about:

- stress or anger management
- grief and trauma
- managing money and budgeting
- finding a job or going back to school
- accessing safe, affordable housing
- healthy eating
- getting social assistance or disability benefits
- developing parenting skills.

## **Treatment Levels**

- Individual and group counseling
- Inpatient and residential treatment
- Intensive outpatient treatment
- Partial hospital programs
- Case or care management
- Medication
- Recovery support services
- 12-Step fellowship
- Peer supports

## **Finding Help, Treatment and Support**

**Primary care Physicians**

**Mental Health Professionals**

**Alcoholics Anonymous**

**Narcotics Anonymous**

**Nurse practitioners and other medical professionals**

## **For More Info**

**Faces & Voices of Recovery** – [www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org)

**The Partnership at Drugfree.org** – [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

**NIDA's DrugPubs Research Dissemination Center** – [www.drugpubs.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugpubs.drugabuse.gov)

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)**- [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

**Narcotics Anonymous (NA)**- [www.na.org](http://www.na.org)

**Alateen** - [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** – [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** - <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

# HELPLINES

**Alateen – 1-800-352-9996**

**National Cocaine Hotline- 1-800-COCAINE (262-2463)**

**National Youth Crisis Hotline – 1-800-442-HOPE (4673)**

**Treatment Referral Helpline- 1-800-662-HELP**

**Smoking Cessations Centers – 1-800-QUIT-NOW (7848669)**