

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Drug addiction, also called substance use disorder, is a **disease** that affects a person's brain and behavior and leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal drug or medication. Substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine also are considered drugs. Those who are addicted may continue using the drug despite the harm it causes.

Drug addiction can start with experimental use of a recreational drug in social situations, and, for some people, the drug use becomes more frequent. For others, particularly with opioids, drug addiction begins with exposure to prescribed medications, or receiving medications from a friend or relative who has been prescribed the medication.

The risk of addiction and how fast you become addicted varies by drug. Some drugs, such as opioid painkillers, have a higher risk and cause addiction more quickly than others.

As time passes, individuals may need larger doses of the drug to get high. Soon they need the drug just to feel good. As drug use increases, it is increasingly difficult to go without the drug. Attempts to stop drug use may cause intense cravings and make one feel physically ill (withdrawal symptoms).

Symptoms

Drug addiction symptoms or behaviors include, among others:

- Feeling that you have to use the drug regularly — daily or even several times a day.
- Having intense urges for the drug that block out any other thoughts.
- Over time, needing more of the drug to get the same effect.
- Taking larger amounts of the drug over a longer period of time than you intended.
- Making certain that you maintain a supply of the drug.
- Spending money on the drug, even though you cannot afford it.
- Not meeting obligations and responsibilities; cutting back on social or recreational activities due to drug use.
- Continuing to use the drug, even though you know it is causing problems in your life or causing you physical or psychological harm.
- Doing things to get the drug that you normally would not do, such as stealing.
- Driving or doing other risky activities when you are under the influence of the drug.
- Spending a good deal of time getting the drug, using the drug, or recovering from the effects of the drug.
- Failing in your attempts to stop using the drug.
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when you attempt to stop taking the drug.

Recognizing Drug Use

- **Problems at school or work** — frequently missing school or work, a sudden disinterest in school activities or work, or a drop in grades or work performance.
- **Physical health issues** — lack of energy and motivation, weight loss or gain, or red eyes.
- **Neglected appearance** — lack of interest in clothing, grooming, or looks.
- **Changes in behavior** — exaggerated efforts to stop family members from entering their room or being secretive about where they go with friends; or drastic changes in behavior and in relationships with family and friends.

- **Money issues** — sudden requests for money without a reasonable explanation; or discovery that money is missing, or that items have disappeared from individual's home, indicating maybe the items are being sold to support drug use.

Risk factors

- **Family history of addiction.** Drug addiction is more common in some families and likely involves genetic predisposition. Having a blood relative, such as a parent or sibling, with alcohol or drug addiction, puts one at greater risk of developing a drug addiction.
- **Peer pressure.** Peer pressure is a strong factor in starting to use and misuse drugs, particularly for young people.
- **Mental health disorder.** Having a mental health disorder such as depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or post-traumatic stress disorder, a person is more likely to become addicted to drugs. Using drugs can become a way of coping with painful feelings, such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness, and can make these problems even worse.
- **Lack of family involvement.** Difficult family situations or lack of a bond with parents or siblings may increase the risk of addiction, as can a lack of parental supervision.
- **Early use.** Using drugs at an early age can cause changes in the developing brain and increase the likelihood of progressing to drug addiction.
- **Taking a highly addictive drug.** Some drugs, such as stimulants, cocaine, or opioid painkillers, may result in faster development of addiction than other drugs. Smoking or injecting drugs can increase the potential for addiction. Taking drugs considered less addicting — so-called "light drugs" — can start you on a pathway of drug use and addiction.

Diagnosis

Diagnosing substance use disorder requires a thorough evaluation and often includes an assessment by a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or a licensed alcohol and drug counselor. Blood, urine, or other lab tests are used to assess drug use, but they are not a diagnostic test for addiction. However, these tests may be used for monitoring treatment and recovery.

Treatment

- Individual, group, or family therapy sessions
- Outpatient, residential, and inpatient programs
- Medical support
- Detoxification
- Support groups (AA, NA)



Content adapted from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112>