

Alcohol and Drug Abuse



If you regularly use alcohol or drugs, you may be addicted to them. This means you feel like you have to have alcohol or drugs to get through your everyday life.

Addiction is a condition that affects your brain and causes you to lose control over your actions. When you're addicted to alcohol and drugs, you continue to use them even if you want to stop. This leads to alcohol and drug abuse.

If you have a problem abusing alcohol and drugs, you aren't alone. There are treatment programs to help you manage your addiction so you can take back control of your life.

Symptoms of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

If you aren't sure if you're addicted to alcohol or drugs, consider if you have any of these signs of abuse:

- **Tolerance**—needing more and more alcohol or drugs to get the same buzz or high.
- **Craving**—feeling a strong desire or urge to use alcohol or drugs.
- **Losing control**—once you start drinking or taking drugs, you can't stop.
- **Having withdrawal symptoms**—you experience symptoms like nausea, sweating and shaking if you don't have alcohol or drugs.

Alcohol Abuse

If you abuse alcohol, your drinking gets in the way of responsibilities you have at work, school or home, or your relationships with your friends and family. Alcohol abuse can lead to alcoholism, which means your body eventually needs alcohol to feel normal and function like it should. You might have withdrawal symptoms such as nausea and shakiness if you don't drink. Alcohol abuse can lead to serious liver damage and death.

Talk to your doctor or someone you trust if you:

- Feel bad or guilty about your drinking
- Think you should drink less than you do
- Need a drink as soon as you get up in the morning

Drug Abuse

Like alcohol abuse, drug abuse can get in the way of responsibilities you have at work, school or home, or your relationships with your friends and family. Eventually you will need to take drugs to feel normal, and not just to get high. Drug abuse can happen with illegal drugs like cocaine or heroin, or if you misuse prescription or over-the-counter drugs.

Using drugs over a long period of time can have a negative effect on the areas of your brain that control your judgment and memory. And, drug abuse is dangerous. It can even cause death from an overdose, which means you take too much of the drug.

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*For more information,
contact:*

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA)

United States Department of Health and Human Services
Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/>

En Español: <http://www.samhsa.gov/espanol/>
Phone: 800-662-4357
(English and Español)

National Institute on Drug Abuse

The National Institutes of Health

Website: <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/understand.html>

En Español: <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/Explicacion-Sp.html>
Phone: 301-443-1124
En Español: 240-221-4007

Alcoholics Anonymous
(for help with alcohol abuse)

Website: www.aa.org

En Español: www.aa.org/lang/sp/index.cfm?Media=PlayFlash
Phone: (212) 870-3400

*Healthy Advice physicians may reproduce
this handout for patient use.*

Talk to your doctor or someone you trust if you:

- Need drugs to get through the day
- Want to stop using drugs, but can't
- Do things to get the drug that you wouldn't normally do (like stealing)

Treating Alcohol and Drug Addiction

The first step to treating your addiction to alcohol and drugs is to admit you have a problem and that you need help to get better. It's okay to ask for help from family and friends, and your doctor can help you find a treatment program. With the right treatment program and personal commitment, you can stop using and get sober.

Many treatment programs include:

- **Individual counseling.** Counseling can help you understand the underlying causes of your alcohol or drug abuse. It can also teach you how to cope on a daily basis by setting goals and making changes to your thoughts and behaviors.
- **Group support.** Support groups and self-help groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous) are places where you can share your experiences with others who understand what you're going through.
- **Tools to cope.** You'll learn to recognize and avoid triggers that make you want to drink or use drugs.
- **Medicines** to help with physical withdrawal symptoms and to help your brain start working like it should without alcohol or drugs.
- **Relapse prevention.** Relapse—when you start drinking or using drugs again—is common during treatment for alcohol and drug abuse. This means you might need to adjust your treatment plan.

There isn't one treatment plan that works for everyone, and every treatment plan is different. If you have insurance, this can help pay for treatment. But, if you don't have insurance, don't make much money, or don't have a job, there are treatment centers paid for by the government to help you. If you want more information about treatment centers and support groups, call 1-800-662-HELP.