**Drug Abuse & Addiction**

**Signs, Symptoms, and Help for Drug Problems and Substance Abuse**

Some people are able to use recreational or prescription drugs without ever experiencing negative consequences or addiction. For many others, substance use can cause problems at work, home, school, and in relationships, leaving you feeling isolated, helpless, or ashamed.

If you’re worried about your own or a friend or family member’s drug use, it’s important to know that help is available. Learning about the nature of drug abuse and addiction—how it develops, what it looks like, and why it can have such a powerful hold—will give you a better understanding of the problem and how to best deal with it.

**Understanding drug use, drug abuse, and addiction**

People experiment with drugs for many different reasons. Many first try drugs out of curiosity, to have a good time, because friends are doing it, or in an effort to improve athletic performance or ease another problem, such as stress, anxiety, or depression. Use doesn’t automatically lead to abuse, and there is no specific level at which drug use moves from casual to problematic. It varies by individual.

Drug abuse and addiction is less about the amount of substance consumed or the frequency, and more to do with the consequences of drug use. No matter how often or how little you’re consuming, if your drug use is causing problems in your life—at work, school, home, or in your relationships—you likely have a drug abuse or addiction problem.

**Why do some drug users become addicted, while others don’t?**

As with many other conditions and diseases, vulnerability to addiction differs from person to person. Your genes, mental health, family and social environment all play a role in addiction. Risk factors that increase your vulnerability include:

`Family history of addiction

`Abuse, neglect, or other traumatic experiences in childhood

`Mental disorders such as depression and anxiety

`Early use of drugs

**Method of administration**—smoking or injecting a drug may increase its addictive potential

**Drug addiction and the brain**

Addiction is a complex disorder characterized by compulsive drug use. While each drug produces different physical effects, all abused substances share one thing in common: repeated use can alter the way the brain looks and functions.

Taking a recreational drug causes a surge in levels of dopamine in your brain, which trigger feelings of pleasure. Your brain remembers these feelings and wants them repeated. If you become addicted, the substance takes on the same significance as other survival behaviors, such as eating and drinking. Changes in your brain interfere with your ability to think clearly, exercise good judgment, control your behavior, and feel normal without drugs.

Whether you’re addicted to inhalants, heroin, Xanax, speed, or Vicodin, the uncontrollable craving to use grows more important than anything else, including family, friends, career, and even your own health and happiness. The urge to use is so strong that your mind finds many ways to deny or rationalize the addiction. You may drastically underestimate the quantity of drugs you’re taking, how much it impacts your life, and the level of control you have over your drug use.

**How drug abuse and addiction can develop**

People who experiment with drugs continue to use them because the substance either makes them feel good, or stops them from feeling bad. In many cases, however, there is a fine line between regular use and drug abuse and addiction. Very few addicts are able to recognize when they have crossed that line. While frequency or the amount of drugs consumed doesn’t in themselves constitute drug abuse or addiction, they can often be indicators of drug-related problems.

Problems can sometimes sneak up on you, as your drug use gradually increases over time.

Smoking a joint with friends at the weekend, or taking ecstasy at a rave, or cocaine at an occasional party, for example, can change to using drugs a couple of days a week, then every day. Gradually, getting and using the drug becomes more and more important to you.

If the drug fulfills a valuable need, you may find yourself increasingly relying on it. For example, you may take drugs to calm you if you feel anxious or stressed, energize you if you feel depressed, or make you more confident in social situations if you normally feel shy. Or you may have started using prescription drugs to cope with panic attacks or relieve chronic pain, for example. Until you find alternative, healthier methods for overcoming these problems, your drug use will likely continue.

Similarly, if you use drugs to fill a void in your life, you’re more at risk of crossing the line from casual use to drug abuse and addiction. To maintain healthy balance in your life, you need to have other positive experiences, to feel good in your life aside from any drug use.

As drug abuse takes hold, you may miss or frequently be late for work or school, your job performance may progressively deteriorate, and you start to neglect social or family obligations.

Your ability to stop using is eventually compromised. What began as a voluntary choice has turned into a physical and psychological need. The good news is that with the right treatment and support, you can counteract the disruptive effects of drug use and regain control of your life. The first obstacle is to recognize and admit you have a problem, or listen to loved ones who are often better able to see the negative effects drug use is having on your life.

**Overcoming Drug Addiction**

**Drug or Substance Abuse Treatment, Recovery, and Help**

When you’re struggling with drug addiction, sobriety can seem like an impossible goal. But recovery is never out of reach, no matter how hopeless your situation seems. Change is possible with the right treatment and support, and by addressing the root cause of your addiction. Don’t give up—even if you’ve tried and failed before. The road to recovery often involves bumps, pitfalls, and setbacks. But by examining the problem and thinking about change, you’re already on your way. the way you deal with stress who you allow in your life what you do in your free time how you think about yourself

**Drug addiction treatment and recovery 1: Decide to make a change**

For many people struggling with addiction, the biggest and toughest step toward recovery is the very first one: deciding to make a change. It’s normal to feel conflicted about giving up your drug of choice, even when you realize it’s causing problems in your life. Change is never easy—and committing to sobriety involves changing many things, including:

You may wonder if you’re really ready for all that change or if you have what it takes to quit. It’s okay if you’re torn. Recovering from addiction is a long process, one that requires time, commitment, motivation, and support.

As you contemplate your situation, the following tips can help you make the decision.

Thinking about change then:

-Keep track of your drug use, including when and how much you use. This will give you a better sense of the role the addiction is playing in your life.

-List the pros and cons of quitting, as well as the costs and benefits of continuing your drug abuse.

-Consider the things that are important to you, such as your partner, your kids, your career, or your health. How does your drug use affect those things? Talk it over with someone you trust. Ask the person how he or she feels about your drug use. Ask yourself if there’s anything preventing you from changing.

-What are some things that could help you make the change?

**Preparing for change: 5 key steps to addiction recovery -** Remind yourself of the reasons

1. You want to change.

2. Think about your past attempts at quitting, if any. What worked? What didn’t?

3. Set specific, measurable goals, such as a quit date or limits on your drug use.

4. Remove reminders of your addiction from your home and workplace.

5. Tell friends and family that you’re quitting and ask for their support.

**Drug addiction treatment and recovery: Explore your treatment options**

Once you’ve made the decision to challenge your drug addiction, it’s time to explore your treatment choices. As you consider the options, keep the following in mind:

There’s no magic bullet or single treatment that works for everyone. When considering a program, remember that everyone’s needs are different. Drug addiction treatment should be customized to your unique problems and situation. It’s important that you find a program that feels right.

Treatment should address more than just your drug abuse. Addiction affects your whole life, including relationships, career, health, and psychological well-being. Treatment success depends on developing a new way of living and addressing the reasons why you turned to drugs in the first place. It may have been because of an inability to manage stress, in which case you’ll need to find healthy ways to handle stressful situations.

Commitment and follow-through is key. Drug addiction treatment is not a quick and easy process. In general, the longer and more intense the drug use, the longer and more intense the treatment you’ll need. But regardless of the treatment program’s length in weeks or months, long-term follow-up care is crucial to recovery.

There are many places to turn for help. Not everybody requires medically supervised detox or an extended stint in rehab. The level of care you need depends on your age, drug use history, and other medical or psychiatric conditions. In addition to doctors and psychologists, many clergy members, social workers, and counselors offer addiction treatment services.

As you seek help for drug addiction, it’s also important to get treatment for any other medical or psychological issues you’re experiencing. Your best chance of recovery is through integrated treatment for both the substance abuse problem and the mental health problem. This means getting combined mental health and addiction treatment from the same treatment provider or team.

**Drug addiction treatment and recovery: Reach out for support**

Don’t try to go it alone. Whatever treatment approach you choose, having a solid support system is essential. The more positive influences you have in your life, the better your chances for recovery.

Recovering from drug addiction isn’t easy, but with people you can turn to for encouragement, guidance, and a listening ear, it’s a little less tough.

Lean on close friends and family – Having the support of friends and family members is an invaluable asset in recovery. If you’re reluctant to turn to your loved ones because you’ve let them down before, consider going to couples counseling or family therapy.

Build a sober social network – If your previous social life revolved around drugs, you may need to make some new connections. It’s important to have sober friends who will support your recovery. Try taking a class, joining a church or a civic group, volunteering, or attending events in your community.

Consider moving in to a sober living home – Sober living homes provide a safe, supportive place to live while you’re recovering from drug addiction. They are a good option if you don’t have a stable home or a drug-free living environment to go to.

Make meetings a priority – Join a recovery support group and attend meetings regularly. Spending time with people who understand exactly what you’re going through can be very healing. You can also benefit from the shared experiences of the group members and learn what others have done to stay sober.

**Drug addiction treatment and recovery: Learn healthy ways to cope with stress**

Even once you’ve recovered from drug addiction, you’ll still have to face the problems that led to your drug problems in the first place. Did you start using drugs to numb painful emotions, calm yourself down after an argument, unwind after a bad day, or forget about your problems? After you become sober, the negative feelings that you used to dampen with drugs will resurface. For treatment to be successful, and to remain sober in the long term, you’ll need to resolve these underlying issues as well.

**Drug addiction treatment and recovery: Keep triggers and cravings in check**

While getting sober from drugs is an important first step, it’s only the beginning of the recovery process. Once sober, the brain needs time to recover and rebuild connections that have changed while addicted. During this time, drug cravings can be intense. You can support your continued sobriety by making a conscious effort to avoid people, places, and situations that trigger the urge to use:

-Make a break from old drug buddies. Don’t make the mistake of hanging out with old friends who are still doing drugs.

-Surround yourself with people who support your sobriety, not those who tempt you to slip back into old, destructive habits.

-Avoid bars and clubs, even if you don’t have a problem with alcohol. Drinking lowers inhibitions and impairs judgment, which can easily lead to relapse. Drugs are often readily available and the temptation to use can be overpowering. Also avoid any other environments and situations that you associate with drug use.

-Be up front about your history of drug use when seeking medical treatment. If you need a medical or dental procedure done, be up front about your history and find a provider who will work with you in either prescribing alternatives or the absolute minimum medication necessary. You should never feel ashamed or humiliated about previous drug use or be denied medication for pain; if that happens, find another provider.

-Use caution with prescription drugs. Stay away from prescription drugs with the potential for abuse or use only when necessary and with extreme caution. Drugs with a high abuse potential include painkillers, sleeping pills, and anti-anxiety medication.

**Coping with drug cravings**

Sometimes craving cannot be avoided, and it is necessary to find a way to cope: Get involved in some distracting activity. Reading, a hobby, going to a movie, exercising (jogging, biking) are good examples of distracting activities. Once you get interested in something else, you’ll find the urges go away. Another effective response to a drug craving is eating (but be careful what you eat, as eating junk will only add stress and inches to your waistline).

Talk it through. Talk to friends or family members about craving when it occurs. Talking about cravings and urges can be very helpful in pinpointing the source of the craving. Also, talking about craving often helps to discharge and relieve the feeling and will help restore honesty in your relationship. Craving is nothing to feel bad about.

Urge surf. Many people try to cope with their urges by gritting their teeth and toughing it out.

But some are just too strong to ignore. When this happens, it can be useful to stay with the urge until it passes. This technique is called urge surfing. Imagine yourself as a surfer who will ride the wave of your drug craving, staying on top of it until it crests, breaks, and turns into less powerful, foamy surf.

Challenge and change your thoughts. When experiencing a craving, many people have a tendency to remember only the positive effects of the drug and forget the negative consequences. Therefore, you may find it helpful to remind yourself that you really won’t feel better if you use and that you stand to lose a lot. Sometimes it is helpful to have these benefits and consequences listed on a small card that you keep with you.

(Adapted from: The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

**Drug addiction treatment and recovery: Build a meaningful drug-free life**

You can support your drug treatment and protect yourself from relapse by having activities and interests that provide meaning to your life. It’s important to be involved in things that you enjoy and make you feel needed. When your life is filled with rewarding activities and a sense of purpose, your addiction will lose its appeal.

Pick up a new hobby. Do things that challenge your creativity and spark your imagination —something you’ve always wanted to try.

Adopt a pet. Yes, pets are a responsibility, but caring for an animal makes you feel loved and needed. Pets can also get you out of the house for exercise.

Get involved in your community. Replace your addiction with drug-free groups and activities.

Volunteer, become active in your church or faith community, or join a local club or neighborhood group.

Set meaningful goals. Having goals to work toward and something to look forward to can be powerful antidotes to drug addiction. It doesn’t matter what the goals are—whether they involve your career, your personal life, or your health—just that they are important to you.

Look after your health. Regular exercise, adequate sleep, and healthy eating habits help you keep your energy levels up and your stress levels down. When you feel good, drugs are much less of a temptation. The more you can do to stay healthy, the easier it will be to stay sober.

**Drug addiction treatment and recovery: Don’t let relapse keep you down**

Relapse is a common part of the recovery process from drug addiction. While relapse is understandably frustrating and discouraging, it can also be an opportunity to learn from your mistakes and correct your treatment course.

**What can cause someone to relapse?**

- Negative emotional states such as anger, sadness, trauma or stress

- Physical discomfort such a withdrawal symptoms or physical pain

- Positive emotional states where you want to feel even better

- Trying to test personal control – “ I can handle just one drink or smoke”

- Strong temptations or urges (cravings to use) – sometimes motivated by others

- Conflict with others such as arguments with a spouse or family

- Social pressure to use again – spending too much time with the wrong people

- Too much good time with friends or family – trying to fit in with the group

The important thing to remember is that relapse doesn’t mean treatment failed. Rather than giving up, get back on the wagon as quickly as you can. Get help from someone you trust and start doing what you know to do. Find out what triggered the relapse find out what went wrong and what you need to do to avoid it happening again. You can choose to get back on the path to recovery and use the experience to strengthen your resolve and commitment to finish the process.

**Source of this materials is, the *“Center for Addiction and Mental Health”***