



Addictions and Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is the continued use of a drug, alcohol or substance, despite knowing that this is both physically dangerous to your body and that it causes or increases persistent or recurrent social, psychological and physical problems.

Drug, alcohol or substance addiction is repeatedly using a substance that leaves the addict in a constant state of intoxication. The addict is unable to voluntarily stop or cut down on the substance intake. The addict is also determined to use and get a hold of the substance by almost all means.

The reasons that people start using drugs or alcohol vary. You may have started drug and alcohol use out of curiosity and wanting to experiment, as a result of peer pressure or as an effort to erase life's problems and challenges. The substance then makes you feel better and seems to solve your problems, which in turn leads you to increase using the substance in order to get a quick fix.

There is no such thing as simple substances, because even common habits such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes can be abused and lead to addiction. You may want to 'graduate' to harder and more harmful drugs when the highs of smoking and drinking no longer satisfy you.

Drug, alcohol or substance addiction is a problem faced by many and it can leave both the addict and loved ones powerless and hopeless. What can be empowering is the knowledge that addictions can be overcome and building a drug free life for yourself can become a reality. You or your loved one needs to make the decision to change and seek help. It is not an easy or quick decision but with support it offers a great possibility.

Get Help Now

When you have made the decision to recover and live a sober life, know that you have made a powerful statement affirming the value of your life. It's not easy, but steps such as these make reaching your goals realistic and achievable.

- **Commit to stop taking drugs or drinking.** It's a gradual process and you may find yourself not ready and making excuses. Acknowledge these feelings and think of the costs and benefits, you'll find there are more benefits to quitting
- **Set goals and prepare for change.** Establishing clear goals will make it easier. Whether your goal is to gradually decrease until you stop or completely cut your intake, write it down and set timeframes for yourself.
- Know that the **only effective and sustainable way to recover is complete abstinence**
- **Ask for help and support.** Whichever route of recovery you take, from rehab to self-help, do not try to go it alone. It is much easier when you have someone who can encourage, comfort and guide you
- **Get sober safely.** You may experience physical withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, headaches, increased heart rate and blood pressure. Never attempt to detox without medical supervision as this may be life threatening

- **Find new meaning in life.** Getting sober is part of recovery. To stay addiction free for the long term is to build a new meaningful life
- **Plan for triggers and cravings.** You will be tempted with cravings for the substance. Develop coping skills such as avoiding places and people that enable the use of substances
- **Don't give up.** Changing a habit is a process that can involve setbacks. When you do relapse, don't take it as failure. Choose to get back on the right path and continue your journey to positive change.

Signs of an Addict

Like any other disease, knowing early that you or someone you know is addicted can help save a life. Be informed of these possible symptoms:

- One drink or hit is never enough for you instead you want to finish all the drugs and alcohol available and get more
- You have become tolerant of the effects the substance has on you, so you start increasing your uptake to get the same high
- You have thought or tried to quit or cut down on drugs or alcohol but your attempts fail and you can't stay sober for long
- Your drug or alcohol use has caused problems in your relationships
- You have been in trouble with the law or at work as a result of your drug, alcohol or substance abuse

When a Loved One is an Addict

- **It is up to them:** You cannot force anyone to stop abusing his or her substance of choice. Encourage your loved one to make the right decision by showing them the benefits of living a sober life and support their attempts at receiving treatment and recovering
- **They cannot do it on their own.** You cannot expect an addict to stop their addiction and maintain a sober life on their own. Help your loved one to develop new coping skills, to seek treatment and gain a network of support
- **Their recovery is an ongoing process:** Your loved one will go through a challenging time while overcoming their addiction. It may even take years before he or she is sober. Offer your time, patience and support throughout this journey to recovery.

Remember that your Patient Manager or EAP counsellor can provide you with meaningful help and advice if you or someone you know is being affected by substance abuse. Call us - we are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.