

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADDICTION

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Preoccupation with mood-altering substances (drugs, alcohol, food) in which there is a loss of self-control and a compulsion to continue despite adverse personal and social consequences.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Depends on the substance of abuse. Most produce:

- A temporary pleasant mood.
- Relief from anxiety.
- False feelings of self-confidence.
- Increased sensitivity to sights and sounds (including hallucinations).
- Altered activity levels—either stupor and sleeplike states or frenzies.
- Unpleasant or painful symptoms when the abused substance is withdrawn.

CAUSES

Substances of abuse may produce addiction or dependence. The most common substances of abuse include:

- Nicotine.
- Alcohol.
- Marijuana.
- Amphetamines; barbiturates; cocaine.
- Opiates, including codeine, heroin, methadone, morphine and opium.
- Psychedelic or hallucinogenic drugs, including PCP (“angel dust”), mescaline and LSD.
- Volatile substances, such as glue, solvents and paints that are inhaled.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Illness that requires prescription pain relievers or tranquilizers.
- Family history of drug abuse.
- Genetic factors. Some persons may be more susceptible to addiction.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Fatigue or overwork.
- Poverty.
- Psychological problems, including depression, dependency or poor self-esteem.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don’t socialize with persons who use and abuse drugs.
- Seek counseling for mental health problems, such as depression or chronic anxiety, before they lead to drug problems.
- Develop wholesome interests and leisure activities.

- After surgery, illness or injury, stop prescription pain relievers or tranquilizers as soon as possible. Don’t use more than you need.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Curable with strong motivation, good medical care and support from family and friends.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Sexually transmitted diseases in addicts who share needles or practice careless sexual behavior while under the influence of drugs.
- Severe infections, such as endocarditis, hepatitis or blood poisoning, from intravenous injections with non-sterile needles.
- Malnutrition.
- Accidental injury to oneself or others while in a drug-induced state.
- Loss of job or family.
- Irreversible damage to body organs.
- Death caused by overdose.

TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Admit you have a problem.
- Seek professional help.
- Be open and honest with your family and good friends, and ask their help. Avoid friends who tempt you to resume your habit.
- Join self-help groups such as Narcotics Anonymous.

MEDICATION

Your doctor may prescribe:

- Disulfiram (Antabuse) for alcoholism. This drug produces severe illness when alcohol is consumed.
- Naltrexone, which blocks the effect of opiates.
- Methadone for narcotic abuse. This drug is a less potent narcotic that is used to decrease the severity of physical withdrawal symptoms or allows a return to a normal life.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions. Exercise regularly.

DIET

Eat a normal, well-balanced diet that is high in protein. Vitamin supplements may be necessary if you suffer from malnutrition.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You abuse or are addicted to drugs and want help or new, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs in treatment may produce side effects.

Adapted from Instructions for Patients, Sixth Edition, H. Winter Griffith, M.D., W.B Saunders Company.