



ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE

Do you use alcohol or medication to cope with negative emotions and stress? "Self-medicating" is a widespread practice. If you have persistent stress or depression, talk to your health care provider.

IS THERE A PROBLEM?

You may not think of alcohol as a drug, but in fact it is the most common drug of abuse. Recovery from alcohol addiction can differ from other addictions, although some of the signs of abuse can be similar.

ALCOHOL:

Crossing the Line—Alcohol abuse can be a gateway to other forms of drug abuse. Why can some people drink without ill effects and others drink and become addicted? After decades of study, scientists still don't fully understand alcohol addiction, or alcoholism. It's a complex disease involving heredity, brain chemistry and environment. Once physical and psychological dependence occurs, alcohol becomes part of the body's chemistry, ultimately controlling behavior and thinking.

How to you know if someone is an alcoholic? Signs include drinking heavily every day, often secretly, as the need for alcohol increases. Alcoholics may withdraw from other interests and people as more of their time is spent drinking. They may struggle to control their drinking with periods of abstinence, but the urge to drink eventually overwhelms their desire to stop. This progression varies from person to person.

DRUGS: Over-the Counter and Prescription ALERT

Drug addicts come in many forms—users of illicit substances such as methamphetamine, cocaine and crack and those who more quietly abuse prescription medication and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs.

Experts say medication abuse is a growing problem most often with pain killers; medications used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders; and stimulants prescribed to treat the sleep disorder narcolepsy and attention deficit disorder (ADHD)

OTC medicines, such as certain cough suppressants (including dextromethorphan); sleep aids such as doxylamine; antihistamines such as diphenhydramine; and dimenhydrinates (as in motion sickness relievers) can be abused for their psychoactive effects. Most of these drugs are particularly dangerous when combined with alcohol.

If you take medication, make sure you:

- Follow the prescribed directions
- Be aware of potential interactions with drugs
- Never stop or change your dosing regimen without first discussing it with your health care provider
- Never use another person's prescription

Tell your health care provider about any medication or dietary or herbal supplement you are taking., And if you think you have a problem, let your provider know.

Warning sign: Prescription drug abusers often "doctor shop"—move from health provider to health provider in an effort to get multiple prescriptions for the drug they abuse.

Why **STOP** or **CUT BACK** the Drinking?

Alcohol is a mind-altering drug with a wide range of health damaging effects. Even small amounts can cause blurred vision, slowed reaction time, drowsiness, indigestion or gastritis, headache, insomnia and fatigue. And a woman who drinks during pregnancy risks serious harm to her unborn child.

Prolonged heavy alcohol use can cause:

- Depression & anxiety
- High blood pressure and heart problems
- Impaired memory and learning ability
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Fatigue and general ill health
- Weakened immunity
- Impotence in men
- Increased risk of cancers of the breast, mouth, lungs, esophagus, stomach, colon and pancreas

HELPFUL RESOURCES for Alcohol and Drugs

- National Institute on Drug Abuse
800-662-HELP OR 800-843-4971
- National Clearinghouse for Drug Information
800-729-6686
- The local agency listed on the "Controlled Substance Policy and Notice to All Employees and Students"
- Your healthcare provider

This brochure is not intended as a substitute for professional care.

What About YOU?

You don't have to be alcoholic to suffer from an alcohol problem. "Alcohol abuse" means you engage in excessive drinking that results in health or social problems, but you aren't dependent on alcohol and haven't fully lost control over the use of alcohol. Alcohol abuse isn't addiction but nevertheless can have many adverse effects on your health and safety.

If you consume alcohol beyond moderate levels—1 drink a day for women, 2 drinks for men—it's time to assess your drinking habit and do something about it.

***Remember**, alcohol abuse or drug addiction is a common problem—you're not alone—and it can be overcome. Don't delay seeking help for you or someone you love. A longer, fuller, happier life could be around the corner.*

NOTHING CASUAL About Using Drugs

Most people do not intend to become drug addicts when they experiment with a drug. Drug misuse or abuse starts out voluntary and controllable, but addiction can quickly result.

Do you suspect someone may be using drugs? You may notice the following personality changes. The person may become...

- Verbally and physically abusive
- Act paranoid, confused and extremely moody
- Seem depressed and withdrawn
- Become more secretive about his or her activities
- Start stealing possessions or "losing" things that were once valued
- Seem to have a lot of money or often ask to borrow money