

Substance Use Disorder & Opioid Use Disorder (SUD-OUD)

Drug addiction, also called substance use disorder, is a disease that:

- Affects a person's brain and behavior
- Leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal drug or medication

Substances such as alcohol, marijuana and nicotine also are considered drugs. When you're addicted, you may continue using the drug despite the harm it causes.

Drug addiction:

- Can start with experimental use of a recreational drug in social situations, **and then**
- Becomes more frequent

Opioid addiction:

- Can begin with:
 - Exposure to prescribed medications, **or**
 - Receiving medications from a friend or relative who has been prescribed the medication

Symptoms

Drug addiction symptoms or behaviors include:

- Continuing to use the drug, even though you know it's causing problems in your life or causing you physical or psychological harm
- Cutting back on social or recreational activities
- Doing things to get the drug that you normally wouldn't do, such as stealing
- Driving or doing other risky activities when you're under the influence of the drug
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when you attempt to stop taking the drug
- Failing in your attempts to stop using the drug
- Feeling that you have to use the drug regularly — daily or even several times a day
- Having intense urges for the drug that block out any other thoughts
- Making certain that you maintain a supply of the drug.
- Needing more of the drug to get the same effect over time.
- Not meeting obligations and work responsibilities.
- Spending a good deal of time getting the drug, using the drug or recovering from the effects of the drug.
- Spending money on the drug, even though you can't afford it.
- Taking larger amounts of the drug over a longer period of time than you intended.

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Risk factors

People of any age, gender, or economic status can become addicted to a drug. Certain factors can affect the likelihood and speed of developing an addiction, including:

- Early use
- Family history of addiction
- Lack of family involvement
- Mental health disorder
- Peer pressure
- Taking a highly addictive drug

Excessive alcohol use

Drinking too much can be harmful to your health. Most people who drink excessively are not alcoholics or alcohol dependent.

Excessive alcohol use includes:

- Binge drinking (defined as five or more drinks within two or three hours for men, and four or more drinks within two or three hours for women)
- Heavy drinking (15 or more drinks a week for men, eight or more drinks a week for women)
- Any drinking by pregnant people or people younger than 21 years

Excessive alcohol use:

- May increase anxiety, depression, or other mental health
- May increase the risk of long-term health issues, including:
 - Birth defects
 - Cancer
 - Heart disease
 - High blood pressure
 - Liver disease
 - Stroke
- Increases the risk of family problems and violence
- Increases the risk for violence, injuries, and motor vehicle crashes

- May alter your thoughts, judgment, and decision-making
- Worsens sleep quality, which makes it more difficult to deal with stress

Substance use

Anyone who uses opioids or illegal drugs can become addicted to them. Different drugs can have different adverse effects. For example, taking too many opioids can stop a person's breathing – leading to death.

Opioid painkillers

Opioid painkiller (e.g., heroin, morphine, codeine, methadone, and oxycodone) are narcotic, painkilling drugs produced from opium or made synthetically.

Sometimes called the "opioid epidemic," addiction to opioid prescription pain medications:

- Has reached an alarming rate across the United States
- Can lead to needing physician-prescribed temporary or long-term drug substitution during treatment

Signs and symptoms of narcotic use and dependence can include:

- Agitation, drowsiness, or sedation
- Confusion
- Constipation
- Constricted pupils
- Depression
- Lack of awareness or inattention to surrounding people and things
- Needle marks (if injecting drugs)
- Problems with attention and memory
- Problems with coordination
- Reduced sense of pain
- Runny nose or nose sores (if snorting drugs)
- Slurred speech

When to see a doctor

If your drug use is out of control or causing problems:

- Get help – The sooner you seek help, the greater your chances for a long-term recovery
- Talk with your primary doctor
- See a mental health professional, such as a doctor who specializes in addiction medicine or addiction psychiatry, or a licensed alcohol and drug counselor

Make an appointment to see a doctor if:

- You can't stop using a drug
- You continue using the drug despite the harm it causes
- Your drug use has led to unsafe behavior, such as sharing needles or unprotected sex
- You think you may be having withdrawal symptoms after stopping drug use

Getting help

To overcome your drug addiction and stay drug-free, you may need help from:

- An organized treatment program
- Family
- Friends
- Support group(s)
- Your doctor

Treatment

Treatment options for you or someone you care may include:

- Beginning and continuing medication-assisted treatment for alcohol or opioid use disorders
- Calling the National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Referral Routing Service (1-800-662-HELP) to speak with someone about an alcohol or substance use problem
- Contacting your healthcare provider.
- Locating virtual treatment recovery programs

- Taking medicine as prescribed and continue your therapy, treatment, or support appointments (in person or through telehealth services) when possible

Prevention

The best way to prevent an addiction to a drug is not to take the drug at all. If your doctor prescribes a drug with the potential for addiction:

- Use care when taking the drug
- Follow the instructions your doctor provides
- Talk to your doctor if you feel you need to take more than is prescribed

Preventing drug misuse in children and teenagers

Take these steps to help prevent drug misuse in children and teenagers:

- Communicate
 - Talk to children about the risks of drug use and misuse
- Listen
 - Be a good listener when children talk about peer pressure, and be supportive of their efforts to resist it
- Set a good example
 - Don't misuse alcohol or addictive drugs, as children of parents who misuse drugs are at greater risk of drug addiction
- Strengthen the bond
 - Work on the relationship you have with the child/children, as a strong, stable bond between you and the child will reduce the child's risk of using or misusing drugs

Additional resources

- **Alcohol-Related Disease Impact (ARDI) →**
- **Alcohol Use and Your Health Fact Sheet →**
- **Alcohol consumption as a risk factor for pneumonia →**
- **2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans →**
- **CDC Alcohol and Pregnancy Website →**
- **CDC Alcohol Portal →**
- **SAMHSA: Training Resources and Opioid Treatment Program Guidance →**

1. Alcohol and Substance Use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/stress-coping/alcohol-use.html>. Last updated: February 17, 2021.
2. Drug addiction (substance use disorder). The Mayo Clinic.
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112>. Last accessed: March 14, 2021.