

DRUG ABUSE AND ADDICTION

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A compulsive and destructive use of mind-altering substances despite adverse medical, psychological and social consequences. It can affect the central nervous system, liver, kidneys and blood.

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 withdrawal symptoms.

CAUSES

Substances of abuse may produce addiction (a physiological need) or dependence (a psychological need). The most common substances of abuse include:

- Nicotine.
- Alcohol.
- Marijuana.
- Amphetamines.
- Barbiturates.
- Cocaine.
- Opiates, including codeine, heroin, methadone, morphine and opium.
- Psychedelic drugs, including PCP ("angel dust"), mescaline and LSD.
- Volatile substances, such as glue, solvents and paints.
- Caffeine.

RISK INCREASES WITH

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

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't socialize with persons who use and abuse drugs.
- Seek counseling for mental-health problems, such as depression or anxiety, before they lead to drug problems.
- Develop wholesome interests and leisure activities.
- After surgery, illness or injury, discontinue the use of prescription pain relievers and tranquilizers as soon as possible. Don't use more than you need.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Curable with strong motivation, good medical care and support from family and friends. However, relapses are common.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Sexually transmitted diseases, which are more frequent among addicts.
- Severe infections, such as endocarditis (infection of the heart), hepatitis or blood poisoning, from intravenous injections with nonsterile 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.
- Incarceration.

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.
- Psychotherapy or counseling.
- Hospitalization for drug-withdrawal symptoms.
- Avoid friends who tempt you to resume your habit.
- Join self-help groups.
- Additional information available from Cocaine Abuse Hotline (800) COCAINE; or Do It Now Foundation, 6423 S Ash Ave, Tempe, AZ 85283, (602) 257-0797; or the Drug Abuse Clearinghouse, 11426 Rockville Pike, Suite 200, Rockville, MD 20852, (301) 443-6500.

MEDICATIONS

- Disulfiram (Antabuse) for alcoholism. This drug produces a severe reaction when alcohol is consumed.
- Methadone for narcotic abuse. This drug is a less-potent narcotic used to decrease the severity of physical withdrawal symptoms.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions. Exercise regularly and vigorously.

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.
- 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.