

Drug Addiction (Substance Use Disorder)

- ⇒ 50% of teenagers have misused a drug at least once.
- ⇒ 12.78% of all 12- to 17-year-olds report using marijuana in the last year.
- ⇒ 788,000 teenagers aged 12- to 17-years-old met the criteria for Illicit Drug Use Disorder (IDUD).

Overview

Drug addiction, also called substance use disorder, is a disease that affects a person's brain and behavior and 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, for some people, the drug use becomes more frequent. For others, particularly with opioids, drug addiction begins with exposure to prescribed medications, or receiving medications from a friend or relative who has been prescribed the medication.

The risk of addiction and how fast you become addicted varies by drug. Some drugs, such as opioid painkillers, have a higher risk and cause addiction more quickly than others.

As time passes, you may need larger doses of the drug to get high. Soon you may need the drug just to feel good. As your drug use increases, you may find that it's increasingly difficult to go without the drug. Attempts to stop drug use may cause intense cravings and make you feel physically ill (withdrawal symptoms).

You may need help from your counselor, doctor, family, friends, support groups or an organized treatment program to overcome your drug addiction and stay drug-free.

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 and follow the instructions provided by your doctor.

Preventing drug misuse in children and teenagers

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

- **Communicate.** Talk to your children about the risks of drug use and misuse.
- **Listen.** Be a good listener when your 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. Children of parents who misuse drugs are at greater risk of drug addiction.
- **Strengthen the bond.** Work on your relationship with your children. A strong, stable bond between you and your child will reduce your child's risk of using or misusing drugs.

Preventing a relapse

Once you've been addicted to a drug, you're at high risk of falling back into a pattern of addiction. If you do start using the drug, it's likely you'll lose control over its use again — even if you've had treatment and you haven't used the drug for some time.

- **Stick with your treatment plan.** Monitor your cravings. It may seem like you've recovered and you don't need to keep taking steps to stay drug-free. But your chances of staying drug-free will be much higher if you continue seeing your therapist or counselor, going to support group meetings and taking prescribed medication.

- **Avoid high-risk situations.** Don't go back to the neighborhood where you used to get your drugs. And stay away from your old drug crowd.
- **Get help immediately if you use the drug again.** If you start using the drug again, talk to your doctor, your mental health professional or someone else who can help you right away.

Signs and Symptoms

Drug addiction symptoms or behaviors include, among others:

- 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
- Over time, needing more of the drug to get the same effect
- Taking larger amounts of the drug over a longer period of time than you intended
- Making certain that you maintain a supply of the drug
- Spending money on the drug, even though you can't afford it
- Not meeting obligations and work responsibilities, or cutting back on social or recreational activities because of drug use
- Continuing to use the drug, even though you know it's causing problems in your life or causing you physical or psychological harm
- 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
- Spending a good deal of time getting the drug, using the drug or recovering from the effects of the drug
- Failing in your attempts to stop using the drug
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when you attempt to stop taking the drug

Recognizing unhealthy drug use in family members

Sometimes it's difficult to distinguish normal teenage moodiness or angst from signs of drug use. Possible indications that your teenager or other family member is using drugs include:

- **Problems at school or work** — frequently missing school or work, a sudden disinterest in school activities or work, or a drop in grades or work performance
- **Physical health issues** — lack of energy and motivation, weight loss or gain, or red eyes
- **Neglected appearance** — lack of interest in clothing, grooming or looks
- **Changes in behavior** — exaggerated efforts to bar family members from entering his or her room or being secretive about where he or she goes with friends; or drastic changes in behavior and in relationships with family and friends
- **Money issues** — sudden requests for money without a reasonable explanation; or your discovery that money is missing or has been stolen or that items have disappeared from your home, indicating maybe they're being sold to support drug use

Recognizing signs of drug use or intoxication

Signs and symptoms of drug use or intoxication may vary, depending on the type of drug. Below you'll find several examples:

Marijuana, hashish, and other cannabis-containing substances

People use cannabis by smoking, eating, or inhaling a vaporized form of the drug. Cannabis often precedes or is used along with other substances, such as alcohol or illegal drugs, and is often the first drug tried.

Signs and symptoms of recent use can include:

- A sense of euphoria or feeling "high"

- A heightened sense of visual, auditory and taste perception
- Increased blood pressure and heart rate
- Red eyes
- Dry mouth
- Decreased coordination
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Slowed reaction time
- Anxiety or paranoid thinking
- Cannabis odor on clothes or yellow fingertips
- Exaggerated cravings for certain foods at unusual times

Long-term (chronic) use is often associated with:

- Decreased mental sharpness
- Poor performance at school or at work
- Reduced number of friends and interests

K2, Spice, and bath salts

Two groups of synthetic drugs — synthetic cannabinoids and substituted or synthetic cathinones — are illegal in most states. The effects of these drugs can be dangerous and unpredictable, as there is no quality control and some ingredients may not be known.

Synthetic cannabinoids, also called K2 or Spice, are sprayed on dried herbs and then smoked, but can be prepared as an herbal tea. Despite manufacturer claims, these are chemical compounds rather than "natural" or harmless products. These drugs can produce a "high" similar to marijuana and have become a popular but dangerous alternative.

Signs and symptoms of recent use can include:

- A sense of euphoria or feeling "high"
- Elevated mood
- An altered sense of visual, auditory and taste perception
- Extreme anxiety or agitation
- Paranoia
- Hallucinations
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure or heart attack
- Vomiting
- Confusion

Substituted cathinones, also called "bath salts," are mind-altering (psychoactive) substances similar to amphetamines such as ecstasy (MDMA) and cocaine. Packages are often labeled as other products to avoid detection.

Despite the name, these are not bath products such as Epsom salts. Substituted cathinones can be eaten, snorted, inhaled, or injected and are highly addictive. These drugs can cause severe intoxication, which results in dangerous health effects or even death.

Signs and symptoms of recent use can include:

- Euphoria
- Increased sociability
- Increased energy and agitation
- Increased sex drive
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Problems thinking clearly
- Loss of muscle control
- Paranoia

- Panic attacks
- Hallucinations
- Delirium
- Psychotic and violent behavior

Barbiturates, benzodiazepines and hypnotics

Barbiturates, benzodiazepines and hypnotics are prescription central nervous system depressants. They're often used and misused in search for a sense of relaxation or a desire to "switch off" or forget stress-related thoughts or feelings.

- **Barbiturates.** Examples include phenobarbital and secobarbital (Seconal).
- **Benzodiazepines.** Examples include sedatives, such as diazepam (Valium), alprazolam (Xanax), lorazepam (Ativan), clonazepam (Klonopin) and chlordiazepoxide (Librium).
- **Hypnotics.** Examples include prescription sleeping medications such as zolpidem (Ambien, Intermezzo, others) and zaleplon (Sonata).

Signs and symptoms of recent use can include:

- Drowsiness
- Slurred speech
- Lack of coordination
- Irritability or changes in mood
- Problems concentrating or thinking clearly
- Memory problems
- Involuntary eye movements
- Lack of inhibition
- Slowed breathing and reduced blood pressure
- Falls or accidents
- Dizziness

Meth, cocaine and other stimulants

Stimulants include amphetamines, meth (methamphetamine), cocaine, methylphenidate (Ritalin, Concerta, others) and amphetamine-dextroamphetamine (Adderall, Adderall XR, others). They are often used and misused in search of a "high," or to boost energy, to improve performance at work or school, or to lose weight or control appetite.

Signs and symptoms of recent use can include:

- Feeling of exhilaration and excess confidence
- Increased alertness
- Increased energy and restlessness
- Behavior changes or aggression
- Rapid or rambling speech
- Dilated pupils
- Confusion, delusions and hallucinations
- Irritability, anxiety or paranoia
- Changes in heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature
- Nausea or vomiting with weight loss
- Impaired judgment
- Nasal congestion and damage to the mucous membrane of the nose (if snorting drugs)
- Mouth sores, gum disease and tooth decay from smoking drugs ("meth mouth")
- Insomnia
- Depression as the drug wears off

Club drugs

Club drugs are commonly used at clubs, concerts and parties. Examples include ecstasy or molly (MDMA), gamma-hydroxybutyric acid (GHB), flunitrazepam (Rohypnol — a brand used outside the U.S. — also called roofie) and ketamine. These drugs are not all in the same category, but they share some similar effects and dangers, including long-term harmful effects.

Because GHB and flunitrazepam can cause sedation, muscle relaxation, confusion and memory loss, the potential for sexual misconduct or sexual assault is associated with the use of these drugs.

Signs and symptoms of use of club drugs can include:

- Hallucinations
- Paranoia
- Dilated pupils
- Chills and sweating
- Involuntary shaking (tremors)
- Behavior changes
- Muscle cramping and teeth clenching
- Muscle relaxation, poor coordination or problems moving
- Reduced inhibitions
- Heightened or altered sense of sight, sound and taste
- Poor judgment
- Memory problems or loss of memory
- Reduced consciousness
- Increased or decreased heart rate and blood pressure

Hallucinogens

Use of hallucinogens can produce different signs and symptoms, depending on the drug. The most common hallucinogens are lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and phencyclidine (PCP).

LSD use may cause:

- Hallucinations
- Greatly reduced perception of reality, for example, interpreting input from one of your senses as another, such as hearing colors
- Impulsive behavior
- Rapid shifts in emotions
- Permanent mental changes in perception
- Rapid heart rate and high blood pressure
- Tremors
- Flashbacks, a re-experience of the hallucinations — even years later

PCP use may cause:

- A feeling of being separated from your body and surroundings
- Hallucinations
- Problems with coordination and movement
- Aggressive, possibly violent behavior
- Involuntary eye movements
- Lack of pain sensation
- Increase in blood pressure and heart rate
- Problems with thinking and memory
- Problems speaking

- Impaired judgment
- Intolerance to loud noise
- Sometimes seizures or coma

Inhalants

Signs and symptoms of inhalant use vary, depending on the substance. Some commonly inhaled substances include glue, paint thinners, correction fluid, felt tip marker fluid, gasoline, cleaning fluids and household aerosol products. Due to the toxic nature of these substances, users may develop brain damage or sudden death.

Signs and symptoms of use can include:

- Possessing an inhalant substance without a reasonable explanation
- Brief euphoria or intoxication
- Decreased inhibition
- Combativeness or belligerence
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Involuntary eye movements
- Appearing intoxicated with slurred speech, slow movements and poor coordination
- Irregular heartbeats
- Tremors
- Lingering odor of inhalant material
- Rash around the nose and mouth

Opioid painkillers

Opioids are narcotic, painkilling drugs produced from opium or made synthetically. This class of drugs includes, among others, heroin, morphine, codeine, methadone and oxycodone.

Sometimes called the "opioid epidemic," addiction to opioid prescription pain medications has reached an alarming rate across the United States. Some people who've been using opioids over a long period of time may need physician-prescribed temporary or long-term drug substitution during treatment.

Signs and symptoms of narcotic use and dependence can include:

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

Risk Factors

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

- **Family history of addiction.** Drug addiction is more common in some families and likely involves genetic predisposition. If you have a blood relative, such as a parent or sibling, with alcohol or drug addiction, you're at greater risk of developing a drug addiction.
- **Mental health disorder.** If you have a mental health disorder such as depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or post-traumatic stress disorder, you're more likely to become addicted to drugs. Using drugs can become a way of coping with painful feelings, such as anxiety, depression and loneliness, and can make these problems even worse.
- **Peer pressure.** Peer pressure is a strong factor in starting to use and misuse drugs, particularly for young people.
- **Lack of family involvement.** Difficult family situations or lack of a bond with your parents or siblings may increase the risk of addiction, as can a lack of parental supervision.
- **Early use.** Using drugs at an early age can cause changes in the developing brain and increase the likelihood of progressing to drug addiction.
- **Taking a highly addictive drug.** Some drugs, such as stimulants, cocaine or opioid painkillers, may result in faster development of addiction than other drugs. Smoking or injecting drugs can increase the potential for addiction. Taking drugs considered less addicting — so-called "light drugs" — can start you on a pathway of drug use and addiction.

How Do I Get Help/Treatment

If you are struggling with drug addiction; Treatment options explained below can help you overcome an addiction and stay drug-free. Your treatment depends on the drug used and any related medical or mental health disorders you may have. Long-term follow-up is important to prevent relapse.

Chemical dependence treatment programs

Treatment programs usually offer:

- Individual, group or family therapy sessions
- A focus on understanding the nature of addiction, becoming drug-free and preventing relapse
- Levels of care and settings that vary depending on your needs, such as outpatient, residential and inpatient programs

Detoxification

The goal of detoxification, also called "detox" or withdrawal therapy, is to enable you to stop taking the addicting drug as quickly and safely as possible. For some people, it may be safe to undergo withdrawal therapy on an outpatient basis. Others may need admission to a hospital or a residential treatment center.

Withdrawal from different categories of drugs — such as depressants, stimulants or opioids — produces different side effects and requires different approaches. Detox may involve gradually reducing the dose of the drug or temporarily substituting other substances, such as methadone, buprenorphine, or a combination of buprenorphine and naloxone.

Opioid overdose

In an opioid overdose, naloxone, an opioid antagonist, can be given by emergency responders, or in some states, by anyone who witnesses an overdose. Naloxone temporarily reverses the effects of opioid drugs.

While naloxone has been on the market for years, delivery systems such as Narcan (a naloxone nasal spray) and Evzio (a naloxone injection device) are now available, though they can be very expensive.

Evzio is a small injection device that provides voice instructions to guide the user and automatically insert the needle into the thigh to deliver the naloxone injection.

Whatever the method of delivery, seek immediate medical care after using naloxone.

Behavior therapy

As part of a drug treatment program, behavior therapy — a form of psychotherapy — can be done by a psychologist or psychiatrist, or you may receive counseling from a licensed alcohol and drug counselor. Therapy and counseling may be done with an individual, a family or a group. The therapist or counselor can:

- Help you develop ways to cope with your drug cravings
- Suggest strategies to avoid drugs and prevent relapse
- Offer suggestions on how to deal with a relapse if it occurs
- Talk about issues regarding your job, legal problems, and relationships with family and friends
- Include family members to help them develop better communication skills and be supportive
- Address other mental health conditions

Self-help groups

Many, though not all, self-help support groups use the 12-step model first developed by Alcoholics Anonymous. Self-help support groups, such as Narcotics Anonymous, help people who are addicted to drugs. Additionally, Celebrate Recovery is another option for support assistance.

The self-help support group message is that addiction is a chronic disorder with a danger of relapse. Self-help support groups can decrease the sense of shame and isolation that can lead to relapse.

Your therapist or licensed counselor can help you locate a self-help support group. You may also find support groups in your community or on the internet.

Need help getting connected to a professional? Email counseling@breakdownstl.org for assistance.

Sources:

* Mayo Clinic - <https://www.mayoclinic.org>

* National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics - <https://drugabusestatistics.org>