

## Life Without Embellishment

### Substance Abuse and Addiction:

Unfortunately, while not everyone who uses drugs becomes addicted, many people do. Drug addiction involves compulsively seeking to use a substance, regardless of the potentially negative social, psychological and physical consequences. Certain drugs, such as narcotics and cocaine, are more likely to cause physical dependence than are other drugs.

Breaking a drug addiction is difficult, but it is *not* impossible. Support from your doctor, family, friends and others who have overcome drug addiction or inpatient or outpatient drug addiction treatment, may help you overcome your dependence on substances.



### Drugs and pregnancy:

Most psychotropic drugs can cross the placenta and affect the unborn child. Any use, even occasional, of some drugs during pregnancy may cause miscarriage, fetal distress or a range of other complications.

### Drugs and driving:

Driving safety requires mental alertness, clear vision, physical coordination and the ability to react appropriately. Drug use can negatively affect these abilities and therefore increase the risk of having an accident. Drugs other than alcohol (e.g., marijuana and cocaine) are involved in about 18% of motor vehicle driver deaths. These other drugs are generally used in combination with alcohol. During 2005, 16,885 people in the U.S. died in alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes, representing 39% of all traffic-related deaths.

### General signs and symptoms:

Addiction to any drug may include these general characteristics:

- » Feeling that you need the drug regularly or many times a day or by increased amounts
- » Making certain that you maintain a supply of the drug
- » Failing repeatedly in your attempts to stop using the drug
- » Doing things to obtain the drug that you normally wouldn't do, such as stealing
- » Feeling that you need the drug to deal with your problems
- » Driving or doing other activities that place you and others at risk of physical harm when you're under the influence of the drug

### Recognizing drug abuse in teenagers:

Possible indications that your teenager is using drugs include:

- **School performance.** Your child suddenly shows an active dislike of school and looks for excuses to stay home.
- **Physical health.** Listlessness and apathy may indicate your child is using certain drugs.
- **Appearance.** A sudden lack of interest in clothing, grooming or looks may be a warning sign of drug use.
- **Personal behavior.** Teenagers enjoy privacy, but exaggerated efforts to bar family members from entering their rooms or knowing where they go with their friends might indicate drug use.
- **Money.** Sudden requests for money without a reasonable explanation for its use, money stolen from previously safe places at home or items disappearing from your home.

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### Causes:

Various factors, such as your personality, your genetic makeup and peer pressure, affect your likelihood of becoming addicted to a drug. In addition, for some people drugs, such as heroin, cocaine and opiates can quickly produce a physical addiction.

### Risk factors:

These factors increase the likelihood of your having an addiction to a legal or an illegal drug:

- **Personality.** If you have another psychological problem, such as depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- **Social environment.** Particularly for young people, peer pressure is a strong factor in starting to use and abuse drugs.
- **Anxiety, depression and loneliness.** Using drugs can become a way of coping with these painful psychological feelings.
- **Genetics.** If you have family members with alcohol or drug problems, you're at greater risk of developing a drug addiction.
- **Type of drug.** Some drugs, such as heroin, cocaine and opiates, more quickly result in physical addiction.



### Complications:

Aside from the physical and psychological problems it causes, dependence on drugs can create a number of other disruptions in your life:

- **Family.** Behavioral changes may cause marital or family strife.
- **Work.** Work performance may decline, and you may be absent from work more often.
- **Social.** You may lose or alienate longtime friends.
- **School.** Academic performance and motivation to excel in school may suffer.
- **Legal.** Stealing to support your drug addiction and driving while impaired are just two of the possible legal problems drug addiction can cause.
- **Financial.** Spending money to support your habit takes away money from your other needs.
- **Health.** Drug use and addiction has many physical consequences that vary depending on which drug you use.

### When to seek medical advice:

Addiction is a chronic relapsing disorder, meaning you tend to fall back into old addictive behaviors, including drug use, even after treatment. The sooner you seek help, the greater your chances are for a long-term recovery. If you're initially reluctant to approach a doctor, help lines or hot lines may be a good place to start to learn about treatment.

### Screening and diagnosis:

Diagnosing a drug addiction often starts at the family doctor level, often after one family member has raised concerns about another family member's behavior. A definitive diagnosis of drug addiction usually occurs after an evaluation by a psychiatrist, psychologist or a specialized addiction counselor.

## Treatment:

Untreated substance abuse and addiction add significant costs to families and communities, including those related to:

- reduced productivity and unemployment
- violence and property crimes
- court and criminal costs, prison expenses
- emergency room visits
- healthcare utilization
- child abuse and neglect
- lost child support
- foster care and welfare costs

One very common belief is that people who are addicted should be able to just stop taking drugs if they are only willing to change their behavior. Unfortunately, for many people, drug abuse becomes chronic, with relapses possible even after long periods of abstinence and occur at rates similar to those with chronic medical illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. As a chronic, recurring illness, addiction may require repeated episodes of treatment before sustained abstinence is achieved. Through treatment tailored to individual needs, people with drug addiction can recover and lead productive lives. Treatment typically involves steps to help you withdraw from using the drug, followed by counseling and attending self-help groups to help you resist using the addictive drug again.

## Coping skills:

Along with counseling and attending self-help groups, talk with your doctor or counselor about other ways you can boost your chances of staying drug-free.

Following are some suggestions:

- **Give yourself time.** For most people, it takes about three months before significant improvement occurs, so don't give up on your treatment program too soon.
- **Promptly seek treatment for other mental health disorders.** Since people with other mental health problems, such as depression, are twice as likely to become addicted to drugs, seek immediate treatment from a qualified mental health professional if you have any signs or symptoms of mental illness.
- **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.

## Some helpful resources are:

- » Narcotics Anonymous [www.na.org](http://www.na.org) and [portaltools.na.org/portaltools/MeetingLoc/](http://portaltools.na.org/portaltools/MeetingLoc/) Web site contains educational information and meeting locations and times in areas throughout the US.
- » Family Anonymous is a support group for families and friends through local and online meetings [www.familiesanonymous.org](http://www.familiesanonymous.org)
- » Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [www.SAMHSA.gov](http://www.SAMHSA.gov)

