

Depression: Alcohol and Drug Abuse



Recovering from depression can be a difficult challenge. At times you may feel overwhelmed. You may be tempted to drink or use drugs to try to escape depression symptoms. But using drugs or alcohol can make your depression worse.

What is substance abuse?

Substance abuse is when drug or alcohol use causes problems in your life. Substance abuse can interfere with your home life, your relationships, and your ability to work. It may lead to legal problems or dangerous behavior such as driving drunk.

Substance abuse can mean having unhealthy or dangerous drinking habits, such as drinking every day or drinking too much at a time. It can also mean taking illegal drugs or taking medicines in a way you are not supposed to. This includes prescription and nonprescription medicines.

What is dependence or addiction?

Having a physical or emotional need to use drugs or alcohol is called dependence or addiction. You are not able to control your use of alcohol or drugs despite the bad effects they

have on your life. When you become dependent, you have to take more alcohol or drugs to keep getting the same effect. You may also have withdrawal symptoms that make you feel sick when you try to quit.

Symptoms

You might be dependent on alcohol if you have three or more of the following problems in a year:

- You cannot quit drinking or control how much you drink.
- You need to drink more to get the same effect.
- You have withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking. These include feeling sick to your stomach, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety.
- You spend a lot of time drinking and recovering from drinking, or you have given up other activities so you can drink.
- You've tried to quit or cut back on drinking but haven't been able to.
- You continue to drink even though it harms your relationships and causes you to develop physical problems.

Who is at risk?

Having a mental illness such as depression, bipolar disorder, or anxiety disorder raises your risk for substance abuse. A family history of substance abuse also raises your risk.

You may use alcohol and drugs to try to relieve depression symptoms. But this can lead to worse depression. Drug or alcohol use also raises your risk of developing depression and other mental health problems.

Impact on your health

Alcohol or drugs can cause health problems. Substance abuse may:

- Contribute to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or panic disorder.
- Raise your blood pressure.
- Damage your heart or cause heart failure.
- Lead to liver disease or digestive problems.

Getting help

Talk to your doctor if you think you have an alcohol or drug problem. Your doctor can talk to you about your concerns and treatment options. Tell a friend or loved one if you think you may need help. Social support is a very important part of recovery.

It may help to contact a substance abuse program and talk to a counselor about whether he or she thinks you have a problem with alcohol or drugs. Learning about the effects of substance abuse on you and your family may help you stay sober. You can get information from the resources listed below.

Admitting you need help can be hard. You may have doubts about whether you can quit. But your treatment **can** work if you decide to stay sober. Many people have been able to recover.

Treatment options

There are many ways to help yourself get better. If you think you will have withdrawal symptoms when you quit alcohol or drugs, start with seeing your doctor.

Medical treatment

Medicines can help your withdrawal symptoms or help you stay away from alcohol or drugs after you have quit. Counseling and rehab programs can also help you recover. If you are dependent on drugs or alcohol, you may need to go to the hospital.



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Support and self-help groups

In a group, you get to know others who have a substance abuse problem. A group can support your recovery and help you take steps to quit using drugs and alcohol. Check with your local hospital, church, or mental health specialist.

Counseling

Counseling helps you make changes in your life so you can stay sober. You learn to cope with tough emotions and make good choices. It can be done in a group setting or one on one.

Resources

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD)

www.ncadd.org

1-800-622-2255

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

www.aa.org

Call a local AA office or visit the website.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

www.na.org

(818) 773-9999

Al-Anon/Alateen

www.al-anon.alateen.org

1-888-425-2666