

Recognizing and Dealing with Addiction

Teens Who Abuse Alcohol and/or Drugs

Parental and peer substance use are considered two of the more common factors contributing to youthful decisions regarding substance use. The age at which adolescents begin to use alcohol is decreasing, with 25 percent of young people beginning to drink before the age of 13, according to the CDC.

Some adolescents are more at risk of developing substance-related disorders. This includes adolescents with one or more of the following conditions present - children of substance abusers; adolescents who are victims of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse; adolescents with mental health problems, especially depressed and suicidal teens; and physically disabled adolescents.

Adolescent substance abuse is believed by some to be the most commonly missed pediatric diagnosis. Adolescents who use drugs are most likely to visit a physician's office with no obvious physical findings.

Substance abuse problems are more likely to be discovered by physicians when adolescents are injured in accidents occurring while under the influence, or when they are brought for medical services because of intentional efforts to hurt themselves.

Substance Abuse / Chemical Dependency

What is substance abuse/chemical dependence?

There are three different terms used to define substance-related disorders, including the following:

- **Substance Abuse**
Substance abuse is used to describe a pattern of substance (drug) use leading to significant problems or distress such as failure to attend work/school, substance use in dangerous situations (driving a car), substance-related legal problems, or continued substance use that interferes with friendships and or family relationships. Substance abuse, as a disorder, refers to the abuse of illegal substances or the abusive use of legal substances. Alcohol is the most common legal drug of abuse.
- **Substance Dependence**
Substance dependence is used to describe continued use of drugs or alcohol, even when significant problems related to their use have developed. Signs include an increased tolerance or need for increased amounts of substance to attain the desired effect, withdrawal symptoms with decreased use, unsuccessful efforts to decrease use, increased time spent in activities to obtain substances, withdrawal from social and recreational activities, and continued use of substance even with awareness of physical or psychological problems encountered by extent of substance use.
- **Chemical Dependence**
Chemical dependence is also used to describe the compulsive use of chemicals (drugs or alcohol) and the inability to stop using them despite all the problems caused by their use.

What substances are most often abused?

Substances frequently abused include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Alcohol
- Marijuana
- Hallucinogens
- Cocaine
- Amphetamines
- Opiates
- Anabolic Steroids
- Inhalants
- Methamphetamine
- Tobacco

What causes substance abuse/chemical dependence?

Cultural and societal norms influence acceptable standards of substance use. Public laws determine the legal use of substances. The question of whether there is a normative pattern of substance use remains controversial. Substance-related disorders are caused by multiple factors including genetic vulnerability, environmental stressors, social pressures, individual personality characteristics and psychiatric problems. However, determining which of these factors are primary and which are secondary has not been determined, in all cases.

What are the symptoms of substance abuse/chemical dependence?

There are approaches frequently used to prevent adolescent substance use and abuse, including school-based prevention programs usually provide drug and alcohol education and interpersonal and behavior skills training.

Community-based prevention programs usually involve the media and are aimed for parents and community groups; and programs such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) are the most well known community-based programs.

Family-focused prevention programs involve parent training, family skills training, children's social skills training and family self-help groups. Research literature available suggests that components of family-focused prevention programs have decreased the use of alcohol and drugs in older children and improved effectiveness of parenting skills that favorably affected their children's risk factors.

The following are the most common behaviors that indicate an individual is having a problem with substance abuse. However, each individual may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- Getting high on drugs or getting intoxicated (drunk) on a regular basis
- Lying, especially about how much they are using or drinking
- Avoiding friends and family members
- Giving up activities they used to enjoy such as sports or spending time with non-using friends
- Talking a lot about using drugs or alcohol
- Believing they need to use or drink in order to have fun
- Pressuring others to use or drink
- Getting in trouble with the law
- Taking risks, such as sexual risks or driving under the influence of a substance
- Work performance suffers due to substance abuse before, after or during working or business hours
- Missing work due to substance use
- Depressed, hopeless, or suicidal feelings

The symptoms of substance abuse may resemble other medical problems or psychiatric conditions. Always consult your physician for a diagnosis.

How is substance abuse/chemical dependence diagnosed?

A psychiatrist or qualified mental health professional usually diagnoses substance abuse. Clinical findings often depend on the substance abused, the frequency of use and the length of time since last used, and may include the following:

- Weight loss
- Constant fatigue
- Red eyes
- Little concern for hygiene

Treatment for substance abuse/chemical dependence

Specific treatment for substance abuse/chemical dependence will be determined by your physician based on:

- Your age, overall health and medical history
- Extent of the symptoms
- Extent of the dependence
- Type of substance abused
- Your tolerance for specific medications, procedures or therapies
- Expectations for the course of the condition
- Your opinion or preference

A variety of treatment programs for substance abuse are available on an inpatient or outpatient basis. Programs considered are usually based on the type of substance abused. Detoxification (if needed, based on the substance abused) and long-term follow-up management are important features of successful treatment. Long-term follow-up management usually includes formalized group meetings and developmentally age-appropriate psychosocial support systems, as well as continued medical supervision. Individual and family psychotherapy are often recommended to address the developmental, psychosocial and family issues that may have contributed to and resulted from the development of a substance abuse disorder.