

Substance misuse

What it is

Substance misuse is the harmful use of substances, like prescription medications, drugs and alcohol, for non-medical purposes. We might use substances to relax, have fun, cope with or escape a problem. However, using substances to cope with problems doesn't make them go away, and can make them worse. We may also find that we come to depend on drugs or alcohol as a way of coping, rather than finding more positive strategies and solutions.

Recognising you have a problem

Many people regularly use substances or engage in activities without any significant problems. For some people, however, a habit, over which they have control, becomes an addiction, which they cannot control - with damaging psychological and/or physical impacts.

Substance misuse may take place over an extended period of time, making it difficult for us to recognise that what we might initially have thought of as an indulgence or a minor vice, has slipped into addiction. Ask yourself the following questions, and answer them honestly to yourself:

- Do I feel dependent on this substance (glass of wine, pill, drug) to cope with daily life?
- Do I still have voluntary control over how I use it?
- Have I tried to cut down or control this behaviour, and been unable to do so?
- Does it interfere with my ability to manage my responsibilities, such as work and relationships?
- Has it impacted negatively on my physical health? (e.g. nausea, sleep problems, weight gain/loss, infections, accidents, chronic disease)
- Has it impacted negatively on my mental health?(e.g. depression, anxiety, paranoia)
- Do I spend a significant amount of time obtaining, using, concealing, planning, or recovering from this behaviour?
- Am I becoming/ have I become more tolerant of the effect of the substance, do I need more of it than I used to, to experience the same effects?
- Do I experience physical or emotional withdrawal symptoms (such as cravings, insomnia, moodiness, depression, temper, violence, trembling, seizures, hallucinations, and sweats) if I go for a longer than usual period without this substance?

Types of help available

Recognising and accepting that you are misusing or addicted to a substance is the first step in finding solutions. Getting through substance misuse and addiction on your own is very difficult. Talking to family members, friends, your doctor, other health professionals or a telephone helpline about your substance use can help you to feel supported, find appropriate treatment options and assist in your recovery.

There are many ways to manage substance misuse and addiction, including some free and low cost options. Types of support include counselling, medication, rehabilitation centres, self-help programs, support networks and others. Talk to a helpline or healthcare practitioner about available services. Everyone responds differently, so you may need to try a number of options to find what works for you.

Finding positive ways of managing stress and problems will help you to manage your substance use and prevent relapses.

Recovery from substance addiction is a long road and sometimes you may experience setbacks. Don't give up. Try again, lean on your support structures. Also try to figure out what triggered the relapse and how you can change your behaviour in the future.

Sources:

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/static/uploads/files/what-is-substance-misuse-and-addiction-wfyzigyyljub.pdf>

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/info/addiction>