

Facts About Drug Use

What Happens

You may not feel that using drugs is a problem. Maybe you feel that you are a casual user because you use drugs only now and then. You may feel that you can stop using drugs at any time.

But drug use quickly can become a habit, and for many people it may lead to abuse and addiction. You may begin to use drugs without thinking about how drugs can harm you and those you care about. Drug use may become part of your routine, like a morning cup of coffee.

How do you become addicted?

Your brain links pleasure with activities that help you live. For example, you need food to live, so your brain tells you that eating feels good. Food becomes something that you want every day.

Drugs target your brain's limbic system, which allows you to feel pleasure. This causes your brain to release a lot of dopamine and other chemicals that make you feel good. Since the pleasure only lasts a short time, you crave more drugs to get the good feeling back.

Over time, your brain adjusts to drugs by making less dopamine and other chemicals. With less of these chemicals, your brain can't function as well, and it becomes harder for you to feel pleasure. You take drugs to get the good feeling back.

Drugs also affect the parts of your brain that deal with judgment, decision-making, problem-solving, emotions, learning, and memory. They change how the cells in your brain send and process information.

These changes in your brain make it harder to think and make good choices. You may be less able to control your actions.

Symptoms

When drug use, abuse, and dependence occur, you are more likely to have changes in your behavior than to have physical symptoms.

Changes in behavior

Behavior changes may include:

- Changes in sleeping or eating habits, less attention to dressing and grooming, or less interest in sex.
- Up and down moods, a mood or attitude that is getting worse, or not caring about the future.

- Anger toward others or treating others badly.
- Sneaky behavior, lying, or stealing.
- Poor family relationships or relationships that are getting worse.
- New problems at work or school, or problems with the law.
- Not keeping up with old friends and activities, finding new friends, and not wanting old friends to meet them.

These signs don't always mean a person is using drugs. The behavior could be because of work or school stress, or it could be a sign of depression or another medical problem. But behavior changes like these are common in people who abuse drugs.

If you think you or a loved one might have a drug problem, use the "Drug Abuse Screening Test" to check your drug use:

Physical signs of drug abuse or dependence

Physical signs of drug abuse depend on the drug. They may include:

- Red eyes, a sore throat, and a dry cough.
- Needle marks on the arm or other area of the body.
- Small, "pinpoint" pupils in the eyes.
- Losing weight without trying to, or not feeling like eating.
- Changes in how well you sleep.
- Seeing things that don't exist (hallucinations).

Symptoms in older adults

Drug abuse in older adults may go unnoticed, since the signs may be similar to those of aging. Older adults often take more medicines, like sleep medicines and painkillers that can lead to dependence.

Symptoms of withdrawal

When you are dependent on a drug and you stop using it, you may have physical symptoms known as withdrawal. These symptoms depend on the drug.

Common withdrawal symptoms include feeling sick to your stomach and vomiting and having belly pain, sweats, nervousness and shaking, and seizures. These symptoms may start the day you stop using the drug or start slowly and get worse over several days.

When to Call a Doctor

Call 911 or other emergency services right away if you or someone else:

- Has used or currently uses drugs and is having a hard time waking up or can't stay awake.
- Has abused a child or partner when using drugs.

Has overdosed or has withdrawal signs. Be sure to tell the emergency workers that you or someone else is using or trying to quit using drugs. Overdose or withdrawal signs may include:

- Vomiting that doesn't stop or vomiting blood.
- A fever higher than 102 ° F (38.9 ° C).
- Breathing more than 25 breaths a minute, or shortness of breath, such as gasping for air.
- A heart rate over 120 beats a minute even when you are trying to calm down.
- Sudden chest pain or severe stomach pain.
- Seizure.
- Shaking and chills.
- Passing out.
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations).
- Violent behavior, such as picking fights, harming you, or destroying property.
- Being very confused, such as not knowing where you are.

Call your doctor if:

- Drug use is harming your relationships.
- You often drive or operate machinery when using drugs.
- You have missed work or school because of drug use.
- Your family or friends have asked you to stop using drugs, or you feel you should.
- You use drugs or have used drugs and think you are pregnant.
- You say or do things while using drugs that you feel bad about.
- You have tried to stop using drugs but could not.

If you or someone you know is in need of services, contact:

Providence Kodiak Island Counseling Center
717 E Rezanof Drive
Kodiak, AK 99615
907-481-2400

Kodiak Area Native Association
3449 E Rezanof Dr
Kodiak, AK 99615
907-486-9800