



Substance Abuse

Not all substance use is problematic

For some people, drug and alcohol use can seem like fun. It can seem exciting, can be a means to blow off steam, can be a way to bond with others, can be a way to loosen up, can feel like a rite of passage, etc. Recreational use of substances is common in our culture. Some people view college as a natural time to try substances whether it is legal or not.

But...

For others, substance use can lead to problems. If you come from a family where you have relatives that have struggled with addiction, it is important to recognize that you may be at higher risk for developing a substance use problem yourself. If you find that you have an unusually high tolerance – that you can use more of a substance than most people can before feeling intoxicated – that can actually be a sign that you are *more vulnerable* for developing a substance use problem yourself.

Signs of a Potential Problem

Here are some other signs that substance use is no longer recreational or social or that it could be developing into a problem:

- 1) Substances are often taken *in larger amounts than intended*
- 2) Substances are often taken over a *longer period of time than intended*
- 3) There is a persistent *desire to cut down or control use, but efforts to do so are unsuccessful*
- 4) *A great deal of time is spent* in substance-related activities like:
 - a. Obtaining the substance
 - b. Using the substance
 - c. Recovering from the effects of the substance
- 5) There are cravings, urges, or strong desires to use substances
- 6) Recurrent substance use is leading to failures to fulfill responsibilities at work, school, or home
- 7) Recurrent social or personal problems are either causes or worsened by substance use, but the substance use continues anyway
- 8) Important activities are given up or reduced because of substance use, including:
 - a. Social activities
 - b. Occupational activities
 - c. Recreational activities
- 9) Substance use recurs in situations in which it is physically hazardous
- 10) Substance use is continued even when it might be contributing to a recurrent or persistent physical or psychological problem

- 11) Tolerance develops, which includes *a need for increasing amounts of the substance in order to achieve intoxication or the desired effect* as well as *decreased effect with continued use of the same amount of the substance*
- 12) Withdrawal symptoms after the intoxication effects of the substance have worn off; these vary according to the substance being used
 - a. Withdrawal symptoms for alcohol:
 - i. Sweating or pulse rate over 100 beats per minute
 - ii. Shakiness/tremors
 - iii. Insomnia
 - iv. Nausea or vomiting
 - v. Temporarily seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are not really there
 - vi. Anxiety
 - vii. Convulsions/seizures
 - b. Withdrawal symptoms for marijuana:
 - i. Irritability, anger, or aggression
 - ii. Nervousness or anxiety
 - iii. Sleep difficulty (e.g., insomnia, disturbing dreams)
 - iv. Decreased appetite or weight loss
 - v. Abdominal pain, shakiness/tremors, sweating, fever, chills, or headache



If you are concerned that you or someone you know may have a substance use problem, you might consider talking with a counselor at PACS. Self-help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-anon, or Narcotics Anonymous can also be great resources for support for both those who struggle with substance use disorders and for their family members.

Adapted from *DSM-5: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fifth Edition, 2013*, American Psychiatric Association



Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS)

3 Garrison Avenue, Smith Hall - 3rd Floor, Durham, NH 03824

Tel: 603-862-2090 Website: www.unh.edu/pacs