

A Look at Drug and Alcohol Awareness

Abusing drugs and alcohol can destroy a person's family life and career very quickly. Unfortunately, people usually wait until they have lost everything before asking for help.

Also, the consequences of drugs and alcohol are not limited to people with the problem. Families, co-workers, and even employers are directly impacted.

How Drugs and Alcohol Work

Drugs alter the chemistry of the brain and nervous system, and act as a stimulant, depressant, or hallucinogen.

Prescription and over-the-counter medications, alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine alter our minds and bodies just like illegal "street drugs".

- **Stimulants** ["uppers"] are used to stay alert, get a rapid surge of energy, or lose weight. Stimulants include coffee, tea, cola drinks, tobacco as well as cocaine, crack, amphetamines, and methamphetamine (speed).
- **Depressants** ["downers"] slow down the central nervous system, making users withdrawn and "spaced out." Alcohol is the most widely used depressant. Others include sedatives, sleep aids, painkillers, barbiturates, heroin, morphine, opium, codeine, Valium, Xanax, Percodan, Demerol, and Darvon.
- **Hallucinogens** alter a person's sense of reality, enhancing and intensifying perception. These include peyote, LSD, mescaline, "magic" mushrooms, and PCP ["angel dust"].

Recognizing Substance Abuse

It is common to attribute a person's erratic behavior to anything but alcohol or drug abuse.

However, erratic behavior and unusual physical symptoms, such as the following, usually are a signal for help.

- Behavioral symptoms: confusion, excitability, mood swings, anger
- Poor health habits
- Strained or abusive relationships with friends, family, or co-workers
- Physical symptoms: red eyes and sleepiness; chronic runny nose and bad breath; scars or needle marks and constricted pupils not light responsive
- Presence of drug paraphernalia such as roach clips, pipes, rolling papers, syringes, razor blades, and straws
- Complaints about money; requests to borrow money
- Increased absences or tardiness at work



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Ideas that Work

Helping someone with alcohol or drug problems can be very difficult—you may be considered the enemy. However, if you fail to act, you risk becoming an “enabler.”

The resources listed below can provide professional support for drug and alcohol treatment and recovery.

Resources

- National Alcohol and Substance Abuse Information Center—1.800.784.6776
- Local community alcohol rehabilitation centers
- Alcoholics Anonymous — www.aa.org
- Narcotics Anonymous — www.na.org
- Your personal physician
- Your priest, minister, or rabbi
- MHNet

Myths and Realities

Myth	Reality
Cocaine is the most widely abused drug in society today.	Alcohol remains the most widely used and abused substance in our society.
Substance abusers are mentally ill and are usually members of skid row or the hard-core unemployed.	Substance abuse is an “equal opportunity” problem.
Problems created by substance abuse are a result of intoxication while on the job.	Withdrawal from substances and family tension create the most impact on work problems.
If no one in my family is a substance abuser, then it should not affect me.	Substance Abuse impacts everyone.