

Drug Addiction

Drug addiction is an issue that's wider than the traditional stereotypes – anyone can become a drug addict. Whether it's called drug dependency, drug addiction or substance abuse, it involves not just illegal drugs, but prescription and non-prescription medications too.

Our relationship with drugs may start out simply enough. They may be just something to help us wind down, or a regular part of a big night out. Or they may be prescribed for us, to help us deal with physical pain or control our moods.

But for some of us, they'll start to consume more and more of our lives. Eventually, we may become so dependent that living without them seems unthinkable – and unbearable. Attempts to cut back may give some unpleasant or frightening side effects.

There are good reasons why many people fail to quit drugs on their own. Addiction happens on two levels: physical and emotional.

Signs of physical drug addiction

Being physically addicted to a substance occurs when your body develops a higher tolerance to the effect of the drug you're taking, whether the substance you are abusing is an illegal drug (like heroin, ice or crystal meth, speed, cocaine, or marijuana) or a prescription or non-prescription medication (like benzos, such as valium, or opioids such as codeine). Higher tolerance means you need a higher and higher dose to feel the same effect.

A physical addiction can be recognised when you stop or cut down the amount you are using. You could expect to experience some, or all, of a range of physical withdrawal symptoms such as:

- Excessive sweating
- Shakiness or tremors
- Sleep disturbances
- Insomnia
- Confusion
- Seizures or blackouts
- Agitation and irritability
- Appetite disturbances
- Increased craving for the substance(s)
- Joint pains
- Flu symptoms or fever
- Mood swings

The length of time it takes for your body to detox or withdraw from a substance varies, depending on what you have become addicted to and on your individual addiction history. This is why it is safer to detox under professional supervision.

Signs of emotional dependence on a substance

Emotional dependence to a drug can occur easily and to different degrees. The signs of being emotionally dependent can be split into two categories: obsessional symptoms and compulsive symptoms.



Obsessional symptoms involve spending large amounts of time 'obsessing' or thinking about the following:

- Using drugs
- How to get more drugs
- Other people who use drugs
- Your behaviour while under the influence
- How to quit or cut down drug abuse
- "The next hit" or "getting high"
- Feeling remorse or guilt for past behaviours
- Justifying why it's okay to use drugs

Compulsive symptoms relate to the way you may try to commit to cutting down or stopping your drug use, yet still find yourself continuing to use your substance of choice. The following symptoms are indicators of significant emotional dependence:

- Unsuccessful efforts to control drug use
- Priority given to drug use over family, work etc
- Loss of recreational interests
- Loss of friendships
- Reduced ability to function socially or at work
- Relationship difficulties or conflict
- Paranoid thinking
- Low self-esteem
- Defensiveness
- Anger or rage outbursts

The South Pacific Private approach to treating drug dependency

Our philosophy of treatment is based on several fundamental points:

- We offer safe, medicated detox under the supervision of medical professionals
- We recognise that drugs often aren't the only issue. Drug abuse is often a response to, or a cause of, other coexisting issues such as depression. Overcoming each issue requires a wider strategy than one designed to treat drug dependency alone
- We treat the whole person, not just one isolated problem. Taking into account the wider circumstances of a person's life – their home life, work, relationships, family, personal medical history, any past traumatic experiences – is the best way to uncover and deal with the influences that are prolonging a drug problem
- Families have an important role to play. Each of our treatment programs includes a component that involves family, to educate them about the recovery process and better equip them for their role as supporters

Key things to remember

- Recovery from drug dependency is more likely to be successful when treatment takes into account the whole person – their physical and emotional wellbeing as well as the wider circumstances of their life, routines and relationships
- Detox should take place under the supervision of trained medical professionals
- A safe, supportive environment, away from the temptation of drugs and life's pressures, will give you the best chance of getting clean

For treatment options, other resources, or a complimentary assessment

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