



Alcohol and Drug Abuse: An Overview

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Introduction

Alcohol abuse

People may drink to socialize, celebrate, or relax. Recent study examined that Light to moderate drinking is safe. It may preserve brain function in older age and could help in correlating with good cognitive condition.

A fewer than eight drinks per week for women and 15 drinks or fewer per week for men are considered as moderate drinking, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While drinking too much and too often can have many negative consequences and is often a step away from dependence and addiction.

Situation of dependency can be resolved by slowly tapering off the use of a particular substance. Though it may lead to experience withdrawal symptoms, when someone stop using the drug altogether. On the contrary, an addiction occurs when the use of drug or Alcohol causes change in a person's brain chemistry which can be overcome only through treatment.

Drug Abuse

Drug abuse or substance abuse, refers to the excessive use of a psychoactive substances especially alcohol and drugs. Drug abuse involves using a drug for a reason/or in way, other than what is advised by a doctor, or suggested on the package. That means either drug is taken by the person who was not prescribed the medication or a person may take more of the drug than prescribed. Depressants, pain relievers and stimulants are some of the commonly abused prescription drugs.

Trying a psychoactive substance for the first time can be tempting but when a person consumes a substance repeatedly over time; they begin building a tolerance and a strong desire to take the drug over and again regardless of the damage they cause.

Prolonged substance abuse can result in a dangerous cycle of addiction which may lead to social, physical and emotional problems.

By the time an individual realizes they have a problem; drugs or alcohol have already seized control, prioritizing its use over all other activities and obligations. On attempting to stop the use of drug, it may cause intense cravings and make you feel physically ill (withdrawal symptoms).

Drug Addiction

Drug addiction is a chronic brain disease that affects a person's brain and behaviour and leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal drug or medication. As the brain changes from addiction can be lasting, so drug addiction is considered a "relapsing" disease.

No one ever plans to become addicted. There are innumerable reasons why someone would try a substance or behaviour. Some are driven by interest in social setting, while others are searching for a way to mitigate pressure.

Other factors that might steer a person towards dangerous substance use behavior include: Genetics and Mental health disorders. Genetics represent 40 to 60% of an individual's probability of building up a substance use issue. Youngsters and grown-ups with mental disorders have more chances to develop substance abuse than the general population.

Long-term addiction can have extreme consequences, such as brain damage and can even result in death.

Addiction and Brain

Excessive use of psychoactive substances affects many parts of the body, but the most impacted organ is the brain. It actually changes the way, the brain functions. People previously exposed to drugs will crave for drugs when they are stressed and a hormone in the brain increases dopamine levels in response to stress.

Dopamine is affected by drugs like cocaine and amphetamines. People who are in recovery, often experience cravings. Though cravings eventually pass, the brain remembers the pleasure it experienced during substance use without paying attention to the harm it caused.

Causes of Substance Abuse

It may include anxiety and depression, curiosity, Genetic predisposition, Social Pressure, Trauma or abuse, family history of Mental illness, Neglect or other childhood trauma, lack of social support structure, Relationship problems, Loss of a loved one, Stress, Chronic pain or medical conditions.

Effects of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse can have an effect on an individual's physical, mental health, as well as social relationships, family, work, school and quality of life. It may include:

1. Damage to organs, such as heart, brain and liver.
2. Damage to immune system which might increase susceptibility to infection.
3. Developing diseases, such as Seizures and strokes, heart disease, HIV, cancer, cirrhosis and other mental illnesses.
4. Permanent changes to hormonal or nervous systems.
5. Permanent brain damage.
6. Risk for social network or relationships.
7. It can cause alcohol poisoning, loss of employment, financial trouble, homelessness, sexual dysfunction are some more short-term and long-term effects.

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How to cope with it?

Cravings for drugs and alcohol are uncontrollable urges that can manifest into physical and mental anguish. Individuals have to understand the science behind cravings and identify their specific triggers. To cope with cravings, research suggests:

1. To have a support of family and friends and talk to them about how you feel.
2. Attend support group meetings.
3. Distract yourself with a new hobby or exercise.

4. Make a list of personal and legal consequences of substance abuse
5. Remind yourself that you are not alone
6. Continue to encourage yourself on your journey.

To overcome addiction, treatment may include counselling, medicine, or both. Even if the recovery is within your reach, try to take support as it's very easy to get discouraged and make excuse "only one more". You can choose any option such as rehab, self-help programs, get therapy or taking a self-directed treatment approach.

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