



Depression: Alcohol and Drug Use

Recovering from depression can be a difficult challenge. At times you may feel overwhelmed. You may be tempted to drink or use drugs to try to escape depression symptoms. But using alcohol or drugs can make your depression worse.

What is a substance use disorder?

Substance use disorder means that a person uses substances even though it causes harm to themselves or others. It can range from mild to severe. The more signs of this disorder you have, the more severe it may be. Moderate to severe substance use disorder is sometimes called addiction. People who have it find it hard to control their use.

This disorder can develop from the use of almost any type of substance. This includes alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription medicines, and over-the-counter medicines.

What is physical dependence?

Having a physical need to use alcohol or drugs is called dependence. You are not able to control your use of alcohol or drugs despite the bad effects they have on your life. When you become physically dependent, you have to take more alcohol or drugs to keep getting the same effect. You may also have withdrawal symptoms that make you feel sick when you try to quit.

What are some signs of an alcohol use disorder?

Certain behaviors may mean that you're having trouble with alcohol. These include:

- Not being able to quit drinking or control how much you drink, or constantly wishing you could cut down.
- Spending a lot of time drinking and recovering from drinking.
- Not being able to do your main jobs at work, at school, or at home.
- Not doing important activities because of your alcohol use.
- Drinking alcohol in situations where doing so is dangerous.

Who is at risk?

Having a mental illness such as depression, bipolar disorder, or anxiety disorder raises your risk for substance use disorder. A family history of substance use disorder also raises your risk. You may use alcohol and drugs to try to relieve depression symptoms. But this can lead to worse depression. Alcohol or drug use also raises your risk of developing depression and other mental health problems.

Impact on your health

Alcohol or drugs can cause health problems. A substance use disorder may:

- Contribute to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or panic disorder.
- Raise your blood pressure.
- Damage your heart or cause heart failure.
- Lead to liver disease or digestive problems.

Getting help

Talk to your doctor if you think you have an alcohol or substance use disorder. Your doctor can talk to you about your concerns and treatment options. Tell a friend or loved one if you think you may need help. Social support is a very important part of recovery.

It may help to contact a recovery support program and talk to a counselor about whether he or she thinks you have a problem with alcohol or drug use. Learning about the effects of substance use on you and your family may help you stay sober. Admitting you need help can be hard. You may have doubts about whether you can quit. But your treatment can work if you decide to stay sober. Many people have been able to recover.

Treatment options

There are many ways to help yourself get better. If you think you will have withdrawal symptoms when you quit alcohol or drugs, start with seeing your doctor.

- **Medical treatment.** Medicines can help your withdrawal symptoms or help you stay away from alcohol or drugs after you have quit. Counseling and rehab programs can also help you recover. If you are dependent on drugs or alcohol, you may need to go to the hospital.
- **Support and self-help groups.** In a group, you get to know others who have a substance use disorder. A group can support your recovery and help you take steps to quit using drugs and alcohol. Check with your local hospital, church, or mental health specialist.
- **Counseling.** Counseling helps you make changes in your life so you can stay sober. You learn to cope with tough emotions and make good choices. It can be done in a group setting or one on one.

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