



STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Most everyone has overindulged at some point in their lives, from having a bit too much to drink or smoking in a social environment to perhaps even experimenting with illegal substances. While most people who “dabble” in unhealthy habits quickly recognize the downside and can easily stop, others have a much harder time quitting.

Medically speaking, substance abuse refers to a pattern of using or misusing substances that cause significant problems or distress. This can range from missing work or school to engaging in dangerous behaviors like driving while intoxicated.

WHAT'S NEW AT YOUR HOSPITAL

- We offer **COVID testing** Monday through Friday from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. by appointment at our Outpatient Clinic. Call (310) 532-4200 to schedule an appointment.
- We are excited to announce our return to normal pre-pandemic **patient visiting hours**. Patients may receive guests from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE CAN INVOLVE LEGAL AND/OR ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES.



LEGAL

Alcohol
Nicotine
Over-the-Counter Medications
Prescription Medications (pain pills, stimulants, anti-anxiety meds, etc.)



ILLEGAL

Cocaine
Hallucinogens
Heroin
Inhalants
Marijuana (in some areas)
Methamphetamine
Opiates

While the lines between legal and illegal substances are clear in most states, what prompts certain people to abuse substances can vary greatly. Substance abuse and dependency can be caused by multiple factors like genetic vulnerability, environmental stress, social pressures, personality characteristics and psychological makeup.

[more ▶](#)

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is one of the most commonly misused legal substances in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control, excessive alcohol use is responsible for one in 10 adult deaths. That's why it's important to recognize how much alcohol is too much.

- **Heavy drinking** is defined as 8 or more drinks per week for women and 15 or more drinks per week for men.
- **Binge drinking** for women is 4 or more drinks on occasion, while for men it's 5 or more.
- Any alcohol use by those **younger than age 21 and pregnant women** is considered substance abuse.



PREVENTING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

There's no "one size fits all" method for preventing substance abuse, but there are some general strategies that do help most people.

UNDERSTAND HOW IT OCCURS Substance abuse most often begins innocently when people experiment with legal and illegal drugs that are addictive, as well as drinking so much alcohol that they become intoxicated. Know what is too much, or not recommended at all, and make a conscious choice to remain within the boundaries.

AVOID TEMPTATION AND PRESSURE Peer pressure is responsible for a variety of substance abuse patterns. If you're tempted by unhealthy habits of those around you, or feel pressured to partake to fit in, reevaluate who you spend time with. Remember, those who have your best interest at heart won't force you to make unhealthy choices.

SEEK HELP FOR MENTAL ISSUES Many mental health conditions, even common ones like anxiety and stress, are strongly tied to substance abuse. If this is the case for you, seek assistance from your healthcare provider or a licensed mental health professional to learn about alternate coping strategies.

KNOW THE RISK FACTORS Addictive behaviors and mental health conditions can run in families. However, knowing that you may be at higher risk for substance abuse due to your family history can make you more aware of the behaviors and toxic environments to avoid.

SEEK BALANCE People tend to adopt unhealthy behaviors when life feels out of control. However, by being mindful of stress levels and finding healthy ways to manage it (i.e., exercise, meditation, etc.), most people can live balanced lives free from unhealthy substances.

If you or someone you love is struggling with substance abuse, make an appointment to discuss the situation with a trusted healthcare provider. You also can find helpful information on these websites.



ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS: aa.org
NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS: na.org
SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION: samhsa.gov

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with "Health Connection" in the subject line.