

Addictions

Addiction means a person has no control over whether he or she uses a drug or drinks. Although similar, there is a difference between addiction and substance abuse. Substance abuse means using an illegal substance or using a legal substance in the wrong way. Addiction usually begins as abuse or using illegal substances. Addiction can be physical, psychological, or both.

REMEMBER

It' okay to make mistakes

Common signs of addictions in young people.

Some of the signs that you or someone you know may have a drug or alcohol addiction include:

- › Use of drugs or alcohol as a way to forget problems or to relax
- › Needing to take more of the substance to get the same effect
- › Feeling shaky or sick when trying to stop using the drug or alcohol
- › Changes in sleeping habits
- › Changes in eating habits, including weight loss or gain
- › Withdrawal or keeping secrets from family and friends
- › Loss of interest in activities that used to be important
- › Problems with schoolwork, such as slipping grades or absences
- › Changes in friendships, such as hanging out only with friends who use drugs
- › Spending a lot of time figuring out how to get drugs
- › Stealing or selling belongings to be able to afford drugs
- › Failed attempts to stop taking drugs or drinking
- › Anxiety, anger, or depression
- › Mood swings

Most research on drug abuse and mental health has shown that the earlier a person starts abusing substances, the more likely it is that they will develop some form of mental health condition, such as psychosis, even years or decades after they first started. This may be because the human brain is still in forming and developing even in the early 20s, and exposing the brain to certain substances can influence that formation.

Diagnosis and treatment

While the signs of addiction can be clear, addiction itself can be difficult to diagnose and treat. That is because the first step to a diagnosis is for a person with an addiction or their family to acknowledge the addiction and want to be helped. If that willingness is there, then it becomes easier. The person with the addiction needs to visit a GP, who will ask questions and do a physical examination to assess overall health. This may include blood tests to determine if medical treatment is needed. Thereafter the GP will refer the person to an addiction or rehabilitation specialist.

There are numerous treatment programs tailored to help teens beat addictions. These include going to rehab, ongoing recovery and behavioural treatments. Behavioural therapy can help teens address psychological issues that lead to drinking or drug use. Behavioural therapy is hands-on for both teens and families. Teens learn skills to resist drug use and cope with triggers, or stressful situations and emotions that lead to cravings.

If you think that you or someone you care about is addicted to drugs or alcohol, the first step to recovery is recognising the problem. Find someone you trust to talk to. Many people think they can beat the addiction on their own, but that rarely works. Professional help is usually required. It is not a sign of weakness to seek professional help from a trained professional.

