
SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Substance abuse is the excessive use of alcohol, polysubstances, and prescription drugs. The substance of abuse may be food, marijuana, caffeine, or nicotine. Sometimes abuse leads to addiction. Addiction requires treatment for recovery to occur and be sustained. There are many choices for treatment; the key, again, is diagnosis, education, support, and treatment.



Veterans and families may use a substance because it brings feelings of pleasure. Some substances lead to escape and some seem to cover one's feelings. The brain is affected differently depending on the substance of abuse. Some believe one can become addicted to sex. This may be a means of escape, power, and an effort to hide pain or find companionship when the veteran suffers from having experienced trauma.

Consequences of substance abuse include difficulties with finances, decompensation of health, destroyed relationships, job performance suffers; you learn to manipulate, and dishonesty permeates your life.

As substance abuse continues, you build a tolerance to the substance and more is required to achieve the desired effect. Your life is falling apart. It may seem like a race to see what you lose first – your family and friends, or your physical health.

Expect changes in mood, sleep, blood pressure, irritability, hunger, and then weight, anger, and sexual functioning.

The road to recovery is the road of your life. Take the first step. A very few are able to stop using after they decide to quit. Most require the support of a program. Your counselor can guide. Your family will need support too. The value of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) is that not only does the abuser receive help and support, but there are associated programs for the family and significant others. Overeaters Anonymous (OA) is an effective support group for individuals with food issues. These support groups observe a code of confidentiality and acceptance. There are often several meetings occurring regularly in some towns, giving you choices and regular support. They offer peer support and are "open" year round. Many programs encourage someone battling an addiction to enroll in a treatment program and attend a program such as AA as well.

Once you make the choice for treatment you will need to learn triggers to cravings for your substance of choice and discover feelings behind your substance abuse history. Veterans suffering symptoms of post trauma are not strangers to substance abuse. You may be seeking to self medicate other symptoms. This is all the more reason to seek treatment. Your counselor and peers at a support group will help you learn to avoid situations that lead to anxiety, fear and stressors that may precipitate substance use. Learning to talk about feelings is probably going to be a new experience, but it will lead to good health and help you to stay clean. Living without substance use is best attempted one day at a time.

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