



When does using become abusing?

Indulging in alcohol and illicit drugs are commonplace in our culture. In fact, studies show nearly two-thirds of Americans report some level of drinking,¹ and 10 percent using an illegal substance.² Some people are able to moderate their use. But others aren't so fortunate. They move from casual use to abuse and finally, addiction, a medical condition known as substance use disorder.

People with substance use disorder "have an intense focus on using a certain substance, such as alcohol or drugs, to the point that it takes over their life," according to the American Psychiatric Association.³ They keep using the substance even though they know it causes problems for their health, their job, and their relationships. Risk factors for this disorder include a family history of addiction, peer pressure, and other mental health issues such as depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁴

The point where substance use disorder begins can be very difficult to see — until it is too late. To see if you may be at risk of having a substance use disorder, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I keep my use a secret from others?
- Are friends and coworkers concerned with my use?
- Do I find any excuse to drink or use the drug?
- Do I use in order to "feel better" or otherwise change the way I am feeling?
- Has my use increased over time?
- Do you make promises to stop or cut back, but never follow through?
- Do I tell myself the health and social problems connected with my use are blown out of proportion?
- Have I ever had a "blackout" (memory lapse) after use?
- Do I feel regret or shame after using, or after an activity I did while using?
- Do I spend more money than I can afford on alcohol or drugs?

The dangers of binge drinking

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, binge drinking is consuming five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women in a row or within a two-hour period.⁵

While binge drinking is not necessarily a sign of alcohol dependency, it is still a dangerous behavior that may cause several health problems. If you are concerned about your drinking habits and not sure if you need help, you can talk to a licensed professional. Just call:

Substance Use Treatment Helpline at 1-855-780-5955.

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- Is there a risk associated with the activity or behavior, such as monetary loss or physical danger?
- Do I look forward to engaging in alcohol or drug use?

If you have answered yes to three or more of these questions, you may be at risk for substance use disorder. This is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness. Substance use disorder is a serious life-threatening condition. However, there are many effective treatments and recovery is possible.

To find out if you need treatment, and what treatment would be best for you, call the **Substance Use Treatment Helpline: 1-855-780-5955.**

This toll-free, confidential hotline is staffed 24/7 by licensed behavioral health experts. They have a deep, real-world understanding of substance use issues. When you talk to our experts, they will take the time to fully understand your unique situation and concerns. If needed, they will arrange for you to meet a trusted, licensed clinician in your area for a face-to-face evaluation. The clinician will also create a personalized care plan if you need one – usually within 24 hours.

The helpline is a confidential service provided at no additional cost to you, and is part of your health benefit. Your personal information will be kept confidential in accordance with state and federal laws.

You can also visit **Liveandworkwell.com/recovery**. This special site provides a wealth of information about substance use disorder and different methods of treatment.

Sources:

1. Gallup poll. Alcohol and Drinking, July 27, 2015. Available at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1582/Alcohol-Drinking.aspx>
2. Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, September 2015, HHS Publication No. SMA15-4927, US Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health.
3. American Psychiatric Association. What Is Addiction? Available at: <http://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/addiction/what-is-addiction>
4. Mayo Clinic. Drug addiction: Risk factors. Available at: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/basics/risk-factors/con-20020970>
5. National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. NIAAA council approves definition of binge drinking [PDF-1.62MB]. NIAAA Newsletter 2004; No. 3, p. 3.

Only a treating health care clinician or physician can endorse any treatment or medication, specific or otherwise. This service provides referrals to such a professional, as well as information to help you maintain and enhance your personal health management. This service and information is not meant to replace professional medical advice. Certain treatments may not be included in your insurance benefits. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.



The perils of prescription painkillers

One of the fastest growing problems substance use involves opioids. Many people start using these drugs legitimately as doctor-prescribed pain medication (such as Vicodin® or Oxycontin®). Opioids work by triggering the “reward centers” in the brain. This not only helps relieve physical pain but can also increase feelings of pleasure while reducing anxiety. So it’s not surprising that some people keep using the drug beyond its intended use. This is where abuse and addiction can occur.

Have you been using an opioid medication and are experiencing some of the signs of substance use disorder listed in the main article? Or have you asked your doctor for more prescriptions even though you no longer need them? If so, you may have become dependent or addicted. To get a professional evaluation from a trusted licensed clinician, just call the **Substance Use Treatment Helpline at 1-855-780-5955.** Or visit **Liveandworkwell.com/recovery** to learn more about your treatment options, and to find a trusted network provider.