

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

SPOTTING THE SIGNS

Neglecting work/school/family responsibilities, spending excessive time getting/using/recovering from drugs/alcohol, continued use despite hard, risky behavior. legal/financial troubles due to SUD, mood swings, mental health issues, withdrawal symptoms such as sweating, nausea, and restlessness, noticeable change in appearance and hygiene, sudden weight loss/gain.

PREVALANCE

- High prevalence: Nearly 1 in 6 Americans aged 12+
- Over a third with SUD struggle with mental health disorders
- Around 3 in 4 people needing care go untreated
- 80K deaths overdose annually.



SYMPTOMS

Red/glazed eyes, slurred speech, sleep issues, secretive behavior, isolation, loss of interest in daily activities, lack of motivation, memory issues, cravings, tolerance, dependance, withdrawal.

THE BRAIN

Drugs cause much higher & longer-lasting dopamine surges than natural rewards (like food or fun). Different drugs act on different brain receptors, but all lead to the dopamine "reward" pathway.



PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Heart & circulation: High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke (esp. stimulants, nicotine).
- Liver & kidneys: Damage from alcohol, opioids, inhalants.
- Lungs: Breathing problems from smoking, vaping, inhalants.
- Immune system: Weaker defense → higher infection risk (HIV, hepatitis)

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LONG-TERM DANGERS

- Alcohol can lead to liver cirrhosis, brain damage.
- Nicotine can lead to cancer, lung & heart disease.
- Stimulants can lead to stroke, psychosis, dental damage.
- Opioids can lead to respiratory failure, overdose.
- Cannabis can lead to memory issues, anxiety, psychosis.



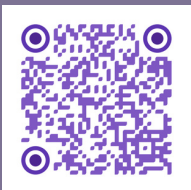
RECOVERY

Recovery is not one-size-fits-all — combining peer support such as 12-step groups like Narcotics Anonymous, therapy, medication has the best chance for long-term healing.

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

People with chronic pain may misuse opioids for pain relief. Teens and young adults may be experimenting or using for recreational purposes, but early use leads to long-term problems. The LGBTQ+ Community has higher use due to stress, stigma, discrimination. Those with mental health struggles are likely to struggle with SUD due to self medication.

Substance Use Disorder is not a moral failing or a sign of weakness—it's a medical condition that affects the brain. With the right support and treatment, recovery is possible. SUD doesn't have to define your life. It doesn't have to be a life sentence.



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