



Help is here

Substance misuse — resources for employees

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

You've probably heard about the risks of drug misuse. But did you know that drug related deaths have more than doubled since 2000? Today, one in four deaths is related to alcohol, tobacco and drug use.¹

We want to keep you informed so you can recognize and deal with substance misuse if you see it.

Understanding substances

There are a lot of different drugs out there. And it can be confusing. Most substances fall into the category of stimulants, depressants or hallucinogens.

Stimulants make users feel energized and provide an energy rush. Depressants relieve stress and anxiety, making users feel relaxed. Hallucinogens are mind-altering drugs that cause distortions in reality and mix the senses. Here are the most commonly reported substances that are linked to substance use disorders:

- Alcohol
- Amphetamines
- Painkillers
- Cocaine
- Marijuana

One of the fastest growing problems is the misuse of painkillers, also known as opioids or opiates. Since they're prescribed by doctors, people may think they're not dangerous. However, it's important to only use the opiates prescribed to you and under the close supervision of a doctor.

¹[Health consequences of drug misuse](#). National Institute on Drug Abuse. Accessed May 2020.

Substances in the workplace

Substance misuse can be very expensive for employers. Studies show workers with substance use problems cost their employers \$81 billion each year.² These costs stem from lost productivity, workplace accidents and increased health-care and insurance costs.

Studies show an employee misusing substances:³

- Is far less productive
- Uses three times as many sick days
- Is more likely to injure themselves or someone else
- Is five times more likely to file a worker's compensation claim.

How people develop a problem

People have a natural appetite for feeling good, causing them to seek out things that help them feel pleasure. What starts out as experimentation may turn into misuse and eventually substance use disorder. When people use a substance, their bodies build up a tolerance. This means they have to use more of the drug to get the same result.

And some people are more susceptible to problems. Family history, genetics and lifestyle are all factors. When a person continues to use a substance, regardless of the negative consequences, they may have a substance use disorder.

Once a person is physically dependent on a substance, they might have withdrawal and strong cravings just a few hours after using. Common symptoms of withdrawal include:

- Stomach problems
- Muscle and bone pain
- Sweating and chills
- Body shakes
- Feeling anxious and "on edge"

Depending on how long the person has been using and how much they use, withdrawal can be dangerous or even life-threatening.

What are the signs of a substance use disorder?

Drugs and alcohol can take over a person's life. The earlier you catch substance misuse, the easier it is to treat. Depending on the substance being used, you may notice different symptoms.

If someone is misusing a depressant — such as alcohol or marijuana — you may see some of the following symptoms:

- Poor concentration and memory loss
- Unsteadiness and slow reaction speed
- Slowed or slurred speech
- Extreme fatigue, sleeping more than usual or "nodding off" during normal activities
- Loss of motivation

If someone is misusing a stimulant — like amphetamines or cocaine — you may notice:

- Hyper-excitability or restlessness
- Talkativeness
- Confusion and panic
- Profuse sweating
- Mood swings, anger, anxiety or paranoia

If the person is going through withdrawal, they may appear to have the flu. You may also see the person sweating, itching or acting restless.

Treatment

Treatment for substance use disorder can be difficult and is often long-term. For many, the first stage in treatment is detoxification (detox). Because withdrawal can be dangerous, it's important to go to a doctor or detox program to stay safe.

Treatment must not only address physical dependence, but also the mental and emotional aspects of substance misuse. There are a number of treatment options to help meet different people's needs. Here are some examples:

- **Outpatient treatment.** Outpatient treatment allows clients to stay in their homes while still working on their healing through regular meetings with a therapist. Often, people can continue to work during treatment.
- **Intensive outpatient.** This treatment approach offers more frequent services than regular outpatient. Clients attend the program three to five times a week while living at home.
- **Inpatient/residential treatment.** This level of care requires that clients stay at the facility. It allows clients to focus entirely on treatment and removes the temptation and accessibility of substances in the community.
- **Medication.** Certain medications have proven to be effective in helping people cope with withdrawal, reduce cravings and/or manage mood issues like depression. They are most effective when coupled with therapy.

²The cost of drug abuse in the workplace. US Drug Test Centers. Accessed May 2020.

³The dangers of substance abuse in the workplace. Very Well Mind. Accessed May 2020.

If you're worried about someone

If you suspect someone misusing drugs or alcohol, reach out and offer help. If the person is a co-worker, you may want to remind him or her of the free resources available through your workplace benefits.

It can be hard to see someone deal with a substance use problem. But you're not alone. We're here for you, 24/7.



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