

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Drug and alcohol abuse affects more than twenty two million individuals in the United States. Although sometimes mistakenly considered deficits in “willpower”, addictions are medical illnesses. Denial of the consequences of the abuse is often the major problem in obtaining adequate assessment and treatment. When the individual with the substance use problem is faced with treatment, the referral is often from another individual such as a spouse or co-worker who has seen firsthand the consequences of the drug or alcohol abuse.

The theories about what causes chemical abuse are many and varied. We now know that a genetic vulnerability to develop these problems may be inherited. But, we also know that individuals who associate with others who abuse chemicals are more likely to develop problems with drugs and alcohol. Thus, these problems are caused by both internal and external factors.

Drug and alcohol problems can strike an individual at any age, including children and adolescents. It is important to remember that there warning signs exist, and when noticed, these signs should be addressed openly. These signs may include: problems at school or work, a need to take in more and more of the substance to get the same effect, more interest in drugs and/or alcohol than other important parts of life, getting annoyed when others mention the problem, legal problems such as driving under the influence or health problems that arise or worsen directly as a result of the abuse. Mood swings, changes in friends, lying and sneaky behaviors may be warning signs of drug or alcohol in adolescents.

If you think that you could have a problem with drugs or alcohol, please visit www.niaaa.nih.gov and ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you ever felt that you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?
- Have others annoyed you by asking about your use?
- Have you ever felt bad or guilty about drug or alcohol use?
- Have you ever used drugs or alcohol first thing in the morning as an eye-opener or to steady your nerves?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions, it is possible that you have a problem with drugs or alcohol, and an assessment is recommended. Even if you answered no to all of these questions but are having problems in the areas described above, you may also benefit from a chemical dependency assessment.