

DEPENDENCE & WITHDRAWAL

AM I DEPENDENT ON DRUGS OR ALCOHOL?

Assessment tools have been developed to measure levels of drug dependence that are used by GPs and workers in drug and alcohol services. It is possible to self assess your own levels of dependence. The information below and the questionnaire at the end of this fact sheet should assist you.

WHAT IS DEPENDENT DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE?

There are degrees of dependency (which is also referred to as addiction) to different substances including licit substances such as alcohol and nicotine. It is impossible to say how long or how often a person must use a drug before they become dependent.

Dependence can be psychological, physical, or both. People who are psychologically dependent on a drug feel compelled in certain or in a number of different, situations to use a drug in order to function effectively, or to achieve emotional satisfaction. Physical dependence is when a person's body adapts to a drug and becomes used to functioning with the drug present.

ALCOHOL:

If person who is physically dependent on alcohol suddenly stops drinking they will have withdrawal symptoms because their body has to readjust to functioning without alcohol. **Symptoms include** loss of appetite, nausea, anxiety, inability to sleep, irritability, confusion, tremors and sweating.

In severe cases, withdrawal may cause convulsions, cramps, vomiting, delusions, hallucinations, and even death. Anyone considering withdrawing from alcohol should first see their doctor.

CRYSTAL:

Withdrawal symptoms from crystal are more psychological than physical and include:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Day 1-3: | Exhaustion, increased sleep, depression, decreased appetite, restlessness, irritability. |
| Day 2-10: | Cravings to use, mood swings, disturbed sleep, poor concentration, aches, pains and stiffness, headaches, increased appetite, unusual thoughts for example paranoia, hallucinations. |
| Day 7-28: | Mood swings, disturbed sleep, cravings, feeling bored, increased appetite |
| 1 to 3 months | Return to normal sleep, mood and activity levels and improvements in general health and mood |

CANNABIS:

Withdrawal symptoms include sleep disturbance, irritability, loss of appetite, nervousness, anxiety, sweating and upset stomach. Sometimes chills, increased body temperature and tremors occur. The withdrawal symptoms usually last for less than a week, although the sleep disturbances may persist for longer.

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WHAT IS DEPENDENT DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE cont...?

If a physically and/or psychologically dependent person suddenly stops taking the drug, they may experience withdrawal symptoms as their body readjusts to functioning without the drug. Withdrawal symptoms are different for different types of drugs and for each person. There are numerous types of withdrawal symptoms that may be experienced, such as depression, irritability, cramps, nausea, sweating and sleeping problems.

People who are physically dependent on a drug usually develop a tolerance to the drug. This means that they need to take more and more of the drug to get the same effect.

HEROIN:

Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- a craving for the drug
- restlessness
- yawning
- low blood pressure
- elevated heart rate
- stomach and leg cramps, muscle spasms
- loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhoea
- goose bumps
- tears and a runny nose
- increased irritability
- insomnia
- depression.

These withdrawal symptoms get stronger and usually peak around 2 to 4 days after last use. They usually subside after 6 to 7 days, but some symptoms, such as chronic depression, anxiety, insomnia, loss of appetite, periods of agitation and a continued craving for the drug, may last for periods of months and even years. Sudden withdrawal from heroin rarely causes direct death, unless the user is also using other drugs and is in poor health. Withdrawal from heroin or opioids is much less dangerous than withdrawal from some other drugs like alcohol or benzodiazepines.

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ECSTASY:

There is evidence that people can become psychologically dependent on ecstasy and it can be very difficult for them to stop or decrease their use. Physical dependence occurs when a person's body gets used to functioning with the drug present. At present, there is no conclusive evidence that people can become physically dependent on ecstasy.

NICOTINE:

Most of these symptoms will disappear within days or weeks of quitting smoking, but cravings may persist for years after stopping using tobacco.

Symptoms include:

- cravings
- irritability, agitation, depression and anxiety
- insomnia and disturbed sleeping patterns
- increased appetite and weight gain
- restlessness and loss of concentration
- headaches
- coughing and sore throat

BENZODIAZEPINES:

Withdrawal symptoms from benzodiazepines vary from person to person, but can be quite severe. Some people have no symptoms at all, while others may have symptoms lasting from a few weeks or months to a year. Symptoms tend to come and go, but all withdrawal symptoms eventually disappear as the body adjusts to functioning without the drug.

Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- headaches
- aching or twitching muscles
- tremor
- faintness or dizziness
- sweating
- nausea, vomiting and stomach pains
- bizarre dreams
- inability to sleep properly
- fatigue
- difficulty concentrating
- anxiety and irritability
- altered perception

heightening of the senses of sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. Other less common withdrawal symptoms may include delirium, delusions, hallucinations, seizures and paranoia.

People who have been using benzodiazepines for more than a month should not suddenly stop taking them without seeing a doctor or health worker. A slow reduction in dose over time is recommended to reduce the severity of the withdrawal symptoms. If you suffer from anxiety and/or insomnia keep in mind they may simply be withdrawal symptoms. If so, these symptoms will eventually cease.

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NICOTINE cont...

- body aches and pains
- stomach and bowel upsets.

In Australia, there are a number of drug treatment options. Some aim solely for the user to achieve a drug-free lifestyle. Others recognise abstinence as one option, however, due to individual circumstances, this may not be possible in certain situations. The overall aim of these programmes is to reduce the harm/risks related to a person's drug use. Treatment is more effective if tailored to suit a person's specific situation and usually involves a combination of methods. The different options include individual counselling, group therapy, medication and supervised/home withdrawal.



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COCAINE:

Symptoms experienced immediately after the person stops using cocaine-usually in the first two to four days.

Symptoms include:

- agitation
- depression
- intense craving for the drug
- extreme fatigue.

Withdrawal, which can last up to ten weeks and is characterised by:

- depression
- lack of energy
- anxiety
- intense craving
- angry outbursts.

Other withdrawal symptoms that may be experienced include:

- lack of motivation
- inability to feel any pleasure
- nausea/vomiting
- shaking
- irritability/agitation
- muscle pain
- long, but disturbed sleep.

Choose a time frame (for example the past month) and then answer each of the following questions about how you felt about your use of a particular drug including alcohol:

1. Do you think your use of _____ was out of control?

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (0) never or almost never | (1) often |
| (2) sometimes | (3) always or nearly always |

2. Did the prospect of not using _____ make you anxious or worried?

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (0) never or almost never | (1) often |
| (2) sometimes | (3) always or nearly always |

3. Did you worry about your use of _____?

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (0) never or almost never | (1) often |
| (2) sometimes | (3) always or nearly always |

4. Did you wish you could stop using _____?

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (0) never or almost never | (1) often |
| (2) sometimes | (3) always or nearly always |

5. How difficult did you (if you did) to stop, or go without _____?

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (0) never or almost never | (1) often |
| (2) sometimes | (3) always or nearly always |

How did you Score?

For each 0 answer give yourself a score of 0, for 1, give yourself a score of 1, and so on. Add up your answers and see what your score is and what it tells you:

Scores 0 - 3: Most people who score low are using weekly or less and are not dependent although there may be aspects of the use of the substance that they are have questions about.

Scores 4 - 5: People who score 4-5 are often starting to experience some problems with their use. They are usually using 2 or three days a week (higher for alcohol/ nicotine), but don't feel the need to use the drug all of the time. This may be a good time to moderate use.

Scores 6 or greater: Most people who score 6 or higher are aware that their use of drugs and/or alcohol is causing problems and might already be thinking about how to cut down their use, and where they can get help and support to do so.

Remember:

If you are using drugs and/ or alcohol regularly and want to stop that you may get withdrawal symptoms when you stop. Withdrawal symptoms vary depending on what you are using, how long you have been using for, general health and your mental health.