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Drug Use and Addiction

Also called: Drug Abuse, Substance Use

What are drugs?

Drugs are chemical substances that can change how your body and mind work. They include prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/overthecountermedicines.html>], alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcohol.html>], tobacco [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>], and illegal drugs.

What is drug use?

Drug use, or misuse, includes:

- Using illegal substances, such as:
 - Anabolic steroids [<https://medlineplus.gov/anabolicsteroids.html>]
 - Club drugs [<https://medlineplus.gov/clubdrugs.html>]
 - Cocaine [<https://medlineplus.gov/cocaine.html>]
 - Heroin [<https://medlineplus.gov/heroin.html>]
 - Inhalants [<https://medlineplus.gov/inhalants.html>]
 - Marijuana [<https://medlineplus.gov/marijuana.html>]
 - Methamphetamines [<https://medlineplus.gov/methamphetamine.html>]
- Misusing prescription medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/prescriptiondrugmisuse.html>], including opioids [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>]. This means taking the medicines in a different way than your health care provider prescribed. This includes
 - Taking a medicine that was prescribed for someone else.
 - Taking a larger dose than you are supposed to.
 - Using the medicine in a different way than you are supposed to. For example, instead of swallowing your tablets, you might crush and then snort or inject them.
 - Using the medicine for another purpose, such as getting high.
- Misusing over-the-counter medicines, including using them for another purpose or in a different way than you are supposed to.

Drug use is dangerous. It can harm your brain and body, sometimes permanently. It can hurt the people around you, including friends, families, and kids. If you are pregnant, it can harm your fetus. Drug use can also lead to mild, moderate, or severe substance use disorders. Substance use disorders are sometimes called addiction.

What is drug addiction?

Drug addiction is a chronic brain disease. It causes a person to take drugs repeatedly, despite the harm they cause.

Repeated drug use can change the brain and lead to addiction.

The brain changes from addiction can be lasting, so drug addiction is considered a "relapsing" disease. This means that people in recovery are at risk for taking drugs again, even after years of not taking them.

Does everyone who takes drugs become addicted?

Not everyone who uses drugs becomes addicted. Everyone's bodies and brains are different, so their reactions to drugs can also be different. Some people may become addicted quickly, or it may happen over time. Other people never become addicted. Whether or not someone becomes addicted depends on many factors. They include genetic, environmental, and developmental factors.

Who is at risk for drug addiction?

Various risk factors can make you more likely to become addicted to drugs, including:

- **Your biology.** People can react to drugs differently. Some people like the feeling the first time they try a drug and want more. Others hate how it feels and never try it again.
- **Mental health problems.** People who have untreated mental health problems [https://medlineplus.gov/mentaldisorders.html], such as depression [https://medlineplus.gov/depression.html], anxiety [https://medlineplus.gov/anxiety.html], or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder [https://medlineplus.gov/attentiondeficithyperactivitydisorder.html] (ADHD) are more likely to become addicted. This can happen because drug use and mental health problems affect the same parts of the brain. Also, people with these problems may use drugs to try to feel better.
- **Trouble at home.** If your home is an unhappy place or was when you were growing up, you might be more likely to have a drug problem.
- **Trouble in school, at work, or with making friends.** You might use drugs to get your mind off these problems.
- **Hanging around other people who use drugs.** They might encourage you to try drugs.
- **Starting drug use when you're young.** When kids use drugs, it affects how their bodies and brains finish growing. This increases your chances of becoming addicted when you're an adult.

What are the signs that someone has a drug problem?

Signs that someone has a drug problem include:

- Changing friends a lot
- Spending a lot of time alone
- Losing interest in favorite things
- Not taking care of themselves - for example, not taking showers, changing clothes, or brushing their teeth
- Being very energetic, talking fast, or saying things that don't make sense
- Quickly changing between feeling bad and feeling good
- Having different eating or sleeping habits
- Missing important appointments
- Having problems at work or at school
- Having problems in personal or family relationships

What are the treatments for drug addiction?

Treatments for drug addiction include counseling, medicines, or both. Research shows that combining medicines with counseling gives most people the best chance of success.

The counseling may be individual, family, and/or group therapy. It can help you:

- Understand why the drug addiction began
- See how drugs changed your behavior
- Learn how to manage personal problems
- Learn to avoid places, people, and situations where drugs are accessible

If you stop or cut back on drugs you've used for a while, you may display different symptoms for different drugs. This is called withdrawal. Medicines can help with the symptoms of withdrawal. For addiction to certain drugs, there are also medicines that can help you re-establish normal brain function and decrease your cravings.

If you have a mental disorder along with an addiction, it is known as a dual diagnosis [https://medlineplus.gov/dualdiagnosis.html] . It is important to treat both problems. This will increase your chance of success.

If you have a severe addiction, you may need hospital-based or residential treatment. Residential treatment programs combine housing and treatment services.

Can drug use and addiction be prevented?

Drug use and addiction are preventable. Prevention programs involving families, schools, communities, and the media may prevent or reduce drug use and addiction. These programs include education and outreach to help people understand the risks of drug use.

NIH: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Start Here

- Drug Addiction (Substance Use Disorder) [https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112?p=1] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112?p=1]
- Drugs A to Z [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/drugs-a-to-z]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/lista-de-drogas-de-la-a-a-z]
- Science of Drug Use: A Resource for the Justice Sector [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/criminal-justice/science-drug-use-resource-justice-sector]  **Easy-to-Read** (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
- Talk with Your Doctor about Drug Misuse and Substance Use Disorder [https://odphp.health.gov/myhealthfinder/healthy-living/mental-health-and-relationships/talk-your-doctor-about-drug-misuse-and-substance-use-disorder]
(Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion)
- Understanding Drug Use and Addiction [https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/drugfacts/entendiendo-el-uso-de-drogas-y-la-adiccion]

Diagnosis and Tests

- Drug Testing [https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/drug-testing/]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-drogas/]
- Drug Testing [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/drug-testing]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
- Mental Health Screening [https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/mental-health-screening/]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/evaluacion-de-salud-mental/]

Prevention and Risk Factors

- Drug Use and Addiction: Prevention [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/prevention]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/prevencion]
- Harm Reduction [https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/harm-reduction]   (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/reduccion-danos]

Treatments and Therapies

- Medications for Substance Use Disorders [https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/treatment/options]
(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
- Treatment of Substance Use Disorders [https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/treatment/]
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Why Are Drugs So Hard to Quit? [https://nida.nih.gov/videos/why-are-drugs-so-hard-to-quit]
  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Living With

- Intervention: Help a Loved One Overcome Addiction [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/in-depth/intervention/ART-20047451?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/in-depth/intervention/art-20047451?p=1>]

Related Issues

- Drugged Driving [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/drugged-driving>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/drugfacts/conducir-bajo-el-efecto-de-drogas>]
- HIV and Substance Use [<https://hivinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv/fact-sheets/hiv-and-substance-use>]  (National Institutes of Health, Office of AIDS Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://hivinfo.nih.gov/es/understanding-hiv/fact-sheets/el-vih-y-el-uso-de-sustancias>]
- How to Identify Drug Paraphernalia [<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/content/how-identify-drug-paraphernalia>] (Drug Enforcement Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/es/content/how-identify-drug-paraphernalia>]
- Infectious Diseases in Persons Who Inject Drugs [<https://www.cdc.gov/persons-who-inject-drugs/about/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Know the Risks of Using Drugs [<https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/learn/risks>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
- Psychedelic and Dissociative Drugs as Medicines [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/psychedelic-dissociative-drugs-medicines>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/el-uso-de-las-drogas-psicodelicas-y-disociativas-como-medicamentos>]
- Stigma and Discrimination [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/stigma-discrimination>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/estigma-y-discriminacion>]
- Substance Use and Misuse in Rural Areas [<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/substance-use>] (Rural Health Information Hub)
- Taking Medicines Safely after Alcohol or Drug Abuse Recovery [<https://familydoctor.org/taking-medicines-safely-after-alcohol-or-drug-abuse-recovery/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/medicacion-segura-despues-del-abuso-de-alcohol-o-drogas/?adfree=true>]
- Trauma and Stress [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trauma-and-stress>] (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Specifics

- Kratom [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/kratom>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/el-kratom>]
- Psychedelic and Dissociative Drugs [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/psychedelic-dissociative-drugs>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/drogas-psicodelicas-disociativas>]
- Synthetic Cathinones ("Bath Salts") [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/synthetic-cathinones-bath-salts>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/catinonas-sinteticas-sales-de-bano>]
- Xylazine [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/xylazine>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/la-xilacina>]

Images

- Drug Index [<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/drugs>] (Drug Enforcement Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/es/drogas>]

Health Check Tools

- Addiction Test [https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/addiction/?layout=actions_c] (Mental Health America)

Test Your Knowledge

- Fact or Fiction? Take the Drug Quiz! [<https://www.justthinktwice.gov/quiz/fact-or-fiction-take-drug-quiz>] (Drug Enforcement Administration)

Statistics and Research

- Drug Overdose Deaths: Facts and Figures [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
- Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/addiction-science/drugs-brain-behavior-science-of-addiction>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/las-drogas-el-cerebro-y-la-conducta-la-ciencia-de-la-adiccion/prefacio>]
- FastStats: Illicit Drug Use [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/drug-use-illicit.htm>] (National Center for Health Statistics)
- Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health [<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2023-nsduh-annual-national-report>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
- More Teens Than Ever Are Overdosing. Psychologists Are Leading New Approaches to Combat Youth Substance Misuse [<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/03/new-approaches-youth-substance-misuse>] (American Psychological Association)
- National Estimates from Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits, 2023 [<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2023-national-estimates-drug-related-emergency-department-visits>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
- Research Topics: Treatment [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/treatment>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/el-tratamiento>]
- Trends & Statistics [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/areas-de-investigacion/las-tendencias-y-estadisticas>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Drug Use and Addiction [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22drug+use+disorders%22+OR+%22drug+addiction%22+OR+%22drug+abuse%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Hallucinogens [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Hallucinogens%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Exploratory Impact of iCARE Nigeria, a Combined mHealth and Peer Navigation... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40729632>]
- Article: Potential predictors affecting outcomes in a randomized controlled trial of support... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40635055>]
- Article: Nicotine e-cigarettes for smoking cessation following discharge from smoke-free inpatient alcohol... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40602856>]
- Drug Use and Addiction -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Drug+Misuse%22%5Bmajr%3Aexp%5D+OR+%22Substance-Related+Disorders%22%5Bmajr%3Aexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Reference Desk

- NIDA: News Releases [<https://nida.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Find an Expert

- Drug Enforcement Administration [<https://www.dea.gov/>]
- FindTreatment.gov [<https://findtreatment.gov/>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://findtreatment.gov/es>]
- National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://nida.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es>]
- Partnership to End Addiction [<https://drugfree.org/>]
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [<https://www.samhsa.gov/>]

Children

- Drugs and Young People: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/drugsandyoungpeople.html>] 
(National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/drugsandyoungpeople.html>]
- Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Substance Use Prevention
[https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/GUDF_2024_FINAL_508.pdf]
(Department of Education; Drug Enforcement Administration) - **PDF**

Teenagers

- Dealing with Addiction (For Teens) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/addictions.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/addictions.html>]
- What Are the Signs of Having a Problem With Drugs? [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators/conversation-starters/what-are-signs-having-problem-drugs>] 
(National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Women

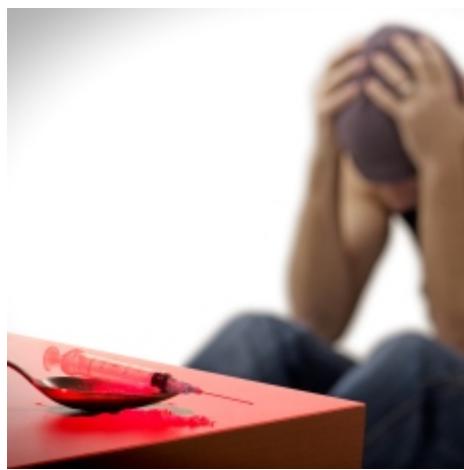
- Alcohol Use Disorder, Substance Use Disorder, and Addiction [<https://womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/alcohol-use-disorder-substance-use-disorder-and-addiction>]
(Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)
- Substance Use in Women Research Report [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/substance-use-in-women/sex-differences-in-substance-use>] 
(National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Older Adults

- Drug and Substance Use Disorders [<https://www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/drug-and-substance-use-disorders>]
(AGS Health in Aging Foundation)
- Substance Use in Older Adults [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/substance-use-in-older-adults-drugfacts>] 
(National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publications/el-consumo-de-drogas-entre-los-adultos-mayores>]

Patient Handouts

- Substance abuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001945.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001945.htm>]
- Substance use disorder [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001522.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001522.htm>]
- Toxicology screen [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003578.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003578.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Barbiturate intoxication and overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000951.htm>]

Drug use first aid [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000016.htm>]

Substance abuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001945.htm>]

Substance use disorder [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001522.htm>]

Substance use recovery and diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002149.htm>]

Toxicology screen [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003578.htm>]

Urine drug screen [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003364.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcoholusedisorderaud.html>]

Anabolic Steroids [<https://medlineplus.gov/anabolicsteroids.html>]

Club Drugs [<https://medlineplus.gov/clubdrugs.html>]

Cocaine [<https://medlineplus.gov/cocaine.html>]

Drugs and Young People [<https://medlineplus.gov/drugsandyoungpeople.html>]

Heroin [<https://medlineplus.gov/heroin.html>]

Inhalants [<https://medlineplus.gov/inhalants.html>]

Marijuana [<https://medlineplus.gov/marijuana.html>]

Methamphetamine [<https://medlineplus.gov/methamphetamine.html>]

Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) [<https://medlineplus.gov/opioidsandopioidusedisorderoud.html>]

Prescription Drug Misuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/prescriptiondrugmisuse.html>]

Smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Drug Use and Addiction* is the National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/druguseandaddiction.html>] on *Drug Use and Addiction*

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

Better Way To Say That: Stigmatizing Language Affects How We Treat Addiction

[<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/a-better-way-to-say-that-stigmatizing-language-affects-how-we-treat-addiction>]

Substance Use Disorders: Get the Facts and Find Support [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/substance-use-disorders-get-the-facts-and-find-support>]

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