

Getting serious about stopping

It is important to get a few things in order to successfully stop using the drug:

1. Organise a safe environment before beginning your withdrawal — no drugs around you and no people who will hassle you.
2. Organise support because it is important to have the right people around you while you go through withdrawal. This means people who will support your effort to stop use; who will spend time with you and be there to help get you through any difficult moments. Your support list should include a good doctor and/or a suitably qualified counsellor (use your workplace EAP!).
3. Structure your time — plan other activities for those times when you are tempted to use the drug:
 - Avoid extra stress or big changes, they can create too much tension
 - Make a point of doing some of those other things you personally find enjoyable and relaxing
 - Get some exercise to help work off the side effects of withdrawal
 - Make sure you drink plenty of fluids such as water, fruit and/or vegetable juices, tea.
4. Medication may have a role to play depending on the drug. Sedatives and other medications may help by reducing the severity of withdrawal symptoms for some people, especially in the early and most difficult stages.

If you are concerned about going through withdrawal, or suspect that it may be difficult due to the type and level of your current drug use, talk to a health professional.

The ideas and strategies outlined in this brochure are often beneficial, but are not comprehensive. Assistance from a professional counsellor may help you to make quicker progress. Remember to use your workplace EAP as a resource.

**Call your EAP on
1800 056 076**

Gryphon Psychology provide a free professional, independent and confidential counselling and consulting service. This service assists employees in both the private and public sectors to find solutions to any work or personal/family problems that are affecting their quality of life and which may be impacting on their effectiveness at work. If needed, our counsellors can make referrals to specialist agencies for particular problems, or for ongoing support.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is completely confidential, and provided by your employer at no cost to you.



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**Substance
Abuse**

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A drug is any chemical substance, either natural or synthetic, which can be used to alter our physical (bodily) or psychological state (how we see things, our mood, our behaviour, our level of alertness). Many substances that we take and use in our everyday lives are therefore by this definition “drugs”.

Drugs and you

Drugs are part of everyday life. How many of us are aware that we are taking a drug when we have a cup of tea, smoke a cigarette, have a glass of wine for pleasure or use some other type of substance to offer us relief of some form? For instance, Aspirin is taken to relieve headaches; Vitamin B is used to alleviate symptoms of stress. Camomile tea is taken to assist with relaxation and achieving sleep.

Drug use becomes a problem however, when used inappropriately or to excess because they can then cause us either physical or psychological harm. It is important to appreciate that drug use has both positive and negative aspects. In many forms, they are a normal and functional part of our lives on the one hand and yet they are potentially dangerous on the other. The need to make drugs work for us, not against us, becomes important.

What is substance abuse?

When our drug use is no longer benefiting us, but instead causes us harm, negative effects arise and impair our physical and/or psychological health or functioning. At this stage, drug use has become a problem and is considered to be substance abuse. This can occur for both licit and illicit drugs.

It is important to know that drugs affect people differently. A person's reaction to a drug will vary according to different factors:

- The type of drug
- The amount and strength of the drug
- How the drug is taken
- Other drugs taken (the consequence of mixing drugs can be very severe)
- A person's body size
- The period of drug use.

The number and intensity of reactions will vary considerably between individuals and events. Although disruptive, these reactions are common and take time to pass. They need to be monitored regularly to ensure that a complete return to normal functioning occurs.

Side effects

The most effective way to cope with the harmful effects of substance abuse is to STOP USE OF THE DRUG. In many instances, once harm or some form of discomfort has been associated with use of a drug, it can be a relatively easy decision to stop using the drug. Usually, the associated problems stop immediately.

However, sometimes it is more difficult to give up using and more direct methods, extra effort and added support is required. A form of drug dependence may have developed and a period of withdrawal often accompanies ceasing of the drug of concern.

It will be easier to successfully stop drug use if we have:

- The correct information relevant to the effects of withdrawal of the specific drug
- Adequate support from either friends, family, your EAP or other source of professional support
- Appropriate medical supervision through your family doctor or a specialist drug treatment agency may be wise, even if not necessary, to offset any medical risks.

Coping with withdrawal

If we use certain kinds of drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, amphetamines, tranquillisers (eg Valium, Serapax), caffeine (coffee) or opiates (eg heroin) regularly and for long periods of time, our body goes through a number of changes. Basically, it adapts to having that drug in our system on a regular basis and means that our body seems to function "normally" only when the drug is in our system.

The types of symptoms that people go through during withdrawal vary according to the kind of drug they are withdrawing from, but the principles are the same. Many of us who are strong and regular coffee drinkers will be able to recognise the patterns of withdrawal described here, from any long periods we've had without our "caffeine" fix!

Severity of withdrawal symptoms will vary from person to person with a number of contributing factors such as:

- Length of time of drug use
- How much has been regularly used
- General state of health and nutrition
- Amount of body fat (for drugs such as alcohol and cannabis)
- Knowing what to expect
- How calm the environment around you is during withdrawal.

Mood is often affected during periods of withdrawal with feelings of agitation, restlessness and irritability common. There are often strong urges and cravings to reuse the drug of concern.

Physical signs which often accompany withdrawal are headaches, nausea and/or vomiting, feeling tired, poor sleep and appetite, sweating and hot and cold flushes, and bodily aches and pains (cold or flu like symptoms).