



SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADDICTION

What is Substance Abuse?

Alcoholism and drug dependence and addiction, known as *substance use disorders*, are complex problems. People with these disorders once were thought to have a character defect or moral weakness; some people mistakenly still believe that. However, most scientists and medical researchers now consider dependence on alcohol or drugs to be a long-term illness, like asthma, hypertension (high blood pressure), or diabetes. Most people who drink alcohol drink very little, and many people can stop taking drugs without a struggle. However, some people develop a *substance use disorder*—use of alcohol or drugs that is compulsive or dangerous (or both).

What Are the Symptoms of Substance Use Disorders?

One of the most important signs of substance addiction or dependence is continued use of drugs or alcohol despite experiencing the serious negative consequences of heavy drug or alcohol use. Often, a person will blame other people or circumstances for his or her problems instead of realizing that the difficulties result from use of drugs or alcohol. Perhaps your loved one has even blamed you. People with this illness really may believe that they drink normally or that “everyone” takes drugs. These false beliefs are called **denial**, and denial is part of the illness.

Other important symptoms of substance use disorders include:

- **Tolerance**—A person will need increasingly larger amounts of alcohol or drugs to get high.
- **Craving**—A person will feel a strong need, desire, or urge to use alcohol or drugs, will use alcohol or a drug despite negative consequences, and will feel anxious and irritable if he or she can't use them. Craving is a primary symptom of *addiction*.
- **Loss of control**—A person often will drink more alcohol or take more drugs than he or she meant to, or may use alcohol or drugs at a time or place he or she had not planned. A person also may try to reduce or stop drinking or using drugs many times, but may fail.
- **Physical dependence or withdrawal symptoms**—In some cases when alcohol or drug use is stopped, a person may experience withdrawal symptoms from a physical need for the substance. Withdrawal symptoms differ depending on the drug, but they may include nausea, sweating, shakiness, and extreme anxiety. The person may try to relieve these symptoms by taking either more of the same or a similar substance.

Several types of treatment programs are available:

- Inpatient treatment
- Residential programs
- Partial hospitalization or day treatment

- Outpatient and intensive outpatient programs
- Methadone clinics (also called opioid treatment programs).

Treatment for Mental Disorders

Many people with a substance use disorder also have emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Adolescents in treatment also may have behavior problems, conduct disorder, or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Treating both the substance use and mental disorders increases the chances that the person will recover. Some counselors think people should be alcohol and drug free for at least 3 to 4 weeks before a treatment professional can identify emotional illness correctly. The program may provide mental health care, or it may refer a person to other sites for this care. Mental health care often includes the use of medications, such as antidepressants.

If you or someone you know displays signs of a substance use disorder, there are resources that can help.

Available Resources

In Texas, Outreach, Screening, Assessment and Referral Centers (OSARs) are the first point of contact for those seeking substance abuse treatment services. All Texas residents who are seeking substance abuse services and information may qualify for services. In the Austin area contact:

Bluebonnet Trails Community MHMR Center (OSAR)

(512) 244-8444 or 1 (800) 841-1255
1009 N. Georgetown Street, Round Rock 78664

Treatment Programs:

Austin Recovery: (512) 697-8600 Admissions or 1 (800) 373-2081 toll free
8402 Cross Park Drive, Austin, TX 78754
www.austinrecovery.org

Oak Springs Treatment Center (Austin Travis County Integral Care): (512) 804-3526
3000 Oak Springs Dr., Bldg. A, Austin, Texas 78702
www.integralcare.org/?nd=bh_oaksprings

Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center, Men's Program: (512) 447-2272
4216 South Congress Avenue, Austin

For Adolescents:

Phoenix Academy: 1 (800) DRUG-HELP or 1 (800) 378-4435
400 W Live Oak Street Austin, TX 78704
www.phoenixhouse.org

Helpful Websites

Austin AA Hill Country Intergroup: Find a Meeting Online

www.austinaa.org

Austin Al-Anon: For family and friends

www.austinalanon.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

Texas Department of State Health Services – Mental Health
and Substance Abuse

www.dshs.state.tx.us/MHSA

“What is Substance Abuse?” through “Treatment for Mental Disorders” from Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.
What Is Substance Abuse Treatment? A Booklet for Families. DHHS Publication No.
(SMA) 04-3955. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004.