

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

In the Clinic  
Annals of Internal Medicine

## What Are Substance Use Disorders?

If alcohol or drugs are having a negative effect on your life, you may have substance use disorder. Substance use disorder can cause damage to your health and relationships. It can also cause problems at work, home, or school. Many people with substance use disorder are not able to stop using drugs or alcohol, even if they want to.

## What Are the Warning Signs of Substance Use Disorder?

- You may have substance use disorder if you:
- Use large amounts of drugs or alcohol or for a longer amount of time than you planned
  - Have trouble cutting down on your use of drugs or alcohol
  - Spend a lot of time trying to get drugs or alcohol
  - Take a long time to recover from drug or alcohol use
  - Have strong cravings or urges to use drugs or alcohol
  - Have trouble at work, school, or home because of drugs or alcohol
  - Continue to use drugs or alcohol even if it causes problems for you
  - Feel like you need to use more drugs or alcohol than before to get the same effects
  - Have withdrawal when you don't use drugs or alcohol

## How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask questions about your substance use.
- You may fill out a series of questions. This can help your physician make a diagnosis.
- You may have blood tests to check for health problems caused by drugs or alcohol.



## How Is Substance Use Disorder Treated?

- Some medicines can be helpful in treating substance use disorder. These medicines may be prescribed by your doctor or another health care provider.
- Group or one-on-one counseling can help you better manage your substance use disorder.
- Self-help groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and day programs are helpful for many people.
- Some choose an overnight treatment program to get more support.
- Talk to your doctor about how to get the care you need. If you are not ready to stop using drugs or alcohol, talk to your doctor. They can help you learn about ways to reduce the effect of substance use on your health.

## Questions for My Doctor

- Is my substance use affecting my health?
- What is the best treatment for me?
- If I don't get treatment, what will happen?
- Are there medicines that could help me? Which ones might be right for me?
- Should I go to a long-term treatment program?
- I need emotional support. Where can I turn?

## For More Information



**National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism**

[www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health)

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**

[www.drugabuse.gov/patients-families](http://www.drugabuse.gov/patients-families)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)