

Alcohol and Other Drug Problems

The overuse of drugs (substance abuse) can cause many problems for people and their families. Substance abuse may pertain to alcohol, illegal drugs (such as cocaine), or legal drugs (such as painkillers). A person is said to have a problem with alcohol or other drugs if use of the substance affects their health or daily living.

Substance abuse can cause many physical and social problems including:

- damage to the liver, nerves, heart, brain, and other organs
- seizures
- withdrawal
- hypertension
- sexual problems
- a tendency towards violent behavior
- accidents
- problems at work and home

There is no single profile that fits everyone who abuses these substances. One person might get drunk or high every day, while another might only drink or take drugs at certain times. Yet another person might stay sober for weeks and then go on a binge that may last for several months.

The friends or family members of a substance abuser can also be affected. They may suffer physical, emotional, or financial harm. Young children of substance abusers may need special attention. It is important to talk with them about the problem. Attempts to deny and cover up the problem do not protect children. Instead, they might blame themselves or feel as if they are crazy because no one is talking about what is really going on. In response to a parent's substance abuse, a child may exhibit school problems, behavior problems, speech disorders, stomach pains, anxiety, fatigue, or sleep disorders.

An adult child of a substance abuser may also suffer from many symptoms. They may have feelings of depression, feel worthless, lack confidence, or have difficulty trusting other people. The symptoms can range from mild to severe. Some adult children of substance abusers appear to function well in society, but may feel empty and lonely inside. Adult children of substance abusers often have a pattern of bad relationships until they decide to break the pattern by learning about the effects of substance abuse on the family.

If you are under stress, do not use alcohol or other drugs to deal with these problems. Find healthy ways to deal with stress. Also, do not rely on pills that help you sleep, lose weight, or relax unless advised by a medical professional.

If you realize that alcohol or other drug use is becoming a problem, there are many avenues for help, including Alcoholics Anonymous or other support groups. If you are the friend or family member of someone who has this problem, one of the following groups can help:

- Al-Anon and Nar-Anon (for friends and family)
- Alatot (for young children)
- Alateen (for teenage children)
- ACA (Adult Children of Alcoholics)

If you are ready to accept help for a problem with alcohol or other drugs, call your medical professional or a Kaiser Permanente Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program and ask about treatment.

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For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.