



HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE  
**SIGNS OF**  
**ADDICTION**

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If you suspect that a loved one is abusing drugs or alcohol, you may be feeling scared, worried, anxious or alone. Discovering a loved one's drug or alcohol addiction can be an overwhelming experience. It's natural to feel angry and disappointed one moment and then feel terrified and worried the next.

Learn to recognize the signs of addiction, as this is the first step toward helping your loved one get the treatment and professional help he or she needs.



## AS DRUG USE INCREASES AMONG AMERICANS, SO DOES ADDICTION

Illicit drug use among Americans is increasing; in 2012, an estimated 23.9 million Americans age 12 or older had used an illicit drug or abused a psychotherapeutic medication (such as a pain reliever) in the last month, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. While celebrities continue to make headlines for abusing heroin and cocaine, more Americans are likely to abuse prescription drugs.

In fact, 52 million people (age 12 or older) in the United States admit to using prescription drugs non-medically at some point in their lifetimes. Deaths related to prescription drugs now outnumber those due to heroin and cocaine combined, and drug-overdose deaths exceed motor vehicle-related deaths in 29 states and Washington, D.C, according to the study, "Prescription Drug Abuse: Strategies to Stop the Epidemic."

Drug and alcohol abuse cost our nation more than \$43 billion in health care expenditures and more than \$428 billion annually in costs related to crime and lost work productivity, as well as health care. Unfortunately, only one in 10 Americans with a substance abuse disorder is currently receiving treatment. Learning to recognize the signs of addiction can help your loved one get the treatment he or she needs to live a sober life.



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## WHY RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF ADDICTION MATTERS

You may have heard that individuals need to hit rock bottom in order to get better. That's simply not true. Recovery can begin at any point during addiction. In fact, the longer that drug abuse continues, the stronger the addiction becomes and the more difficult it is to treat.

For your loved one, this means the earlier that he or she can begin treatment, the easier it will be to get back on the path toward sobriety. The earlier that you are able to recognize the signs of addiction in a loved one and intervene, the better it will be for your loved one's recovery.

Every time that loved ones abuse drugs, they are putting their lives in danger. Long-term drug and alcohol abuse increases the risk for overdose as well as serious health problems. For example, when loved ones are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviors and make poor decisions, such as driving while drinking.

Recognizing the signs of addiction and helping your loved one seek treatment will reduce the risk for serious health problems.



## TOP 10 SIGNS OF ADDICTION

While different drugs have different effects, the behavioral signs of addiction are very similar. The following is a list of 10 common addiction warning signs:

### #1: CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR

Your loved one may seem withdrawn or may lose interest in the activities and hobbies he or she once enjoyed. As drug dependency worsens, your loved one may make up excuses for this disinterest or may resort to lying about his or her behavior and blaming others for why he or she is neglecting the activities.



### #2: CHANGE IN FRIENDSHIPS

Rather than socializing with friends and family, your loved one will spend increasingly more time with individuals who share or enable the substance abuse. This can lead to tension in relationships, such as fights with a partner, an unhappy boss and ultimately the loss of old friends or the alienation of family members. Unfortunately, because your loved one is addicted to drugs or alcohol, he or she does not see how these changes are hurting friends and family. Their lives revolve around substance abuse, and consequently, they spend time the majority of their time with others who also use.



### #3: PERSISTENT MOOD SWINGS

Does it seem like one moment your loved one is easy-going and the next he or she is suddenly moody, depressed, or uncharacteristically violent? Drug abuse can cause abrupt changes in mood that may at first seem very confusing to you. Your loved one may suddenly become withdrawn or lash out at you, picking arguments or starting fights. These uneven moods are due to substance abuse.





#### #4: INABILITY TO STOP USING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL

Does your loved one promise to stop experimenting with drugs or drinking alcohol, but never seems to be able to stop? For example, you may go to a party with a loved one who promises to only have “one drink,” and the next thing you know, he or she has finished off an entire six-pack of beer – and is eyeing yet another drink. Individuals who are addicted to drugs or alcohol frequently claim that they can control their behavior and stop using at any time. However, they are unable to keep these promises, even when the substances they are abusing are seriously impacting their lives. Despite the blackouts, mood swings, depression, paranoia and infections, they continue to use anyway and continue to insist that they can “stop at any time.”



#### #5: ENGAGING IN RISKY BEHAVIOR

Individuals who are addicted to drugs or alcohol are more likely to engage in dangerous or risky behaviors. For example, your loved one may drive while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, engage in unprotected sex, or share needles. Behaviors like driving under the influence not only put your loved one’s life at risk, but also jeopardize the safety of others – and may even result in your loved one going to jail. However, because your loved one is addicted to drugs or alcohol, he or she is unable to understand the serious consequences that can result.



#### #6: CHANGE IN APPEARANCE

Individuals who abuse drugs or alcohol typically undergo unexplained changes in their physical appearance. Some of these changes can be very drastic and happen very quickly. For example, individuals who abuse meth show signs of rapid aging, tooth decay, and a pockmarked face. Individuals who abuse heroin may wear long sleeves even in hot weather to cover up their track marks. Other physical appearance changes may include bloodshot eyes, sudden weight loss, the deterioration of physical appearance and personal grooming habits, and unusual smells on the breath, body, or clothing.



## #7: PERSISTENT TARDINESS OR ABSENTEEISM FROM WORK OR SCHOOL

A drop in attendance or persistent tardiness at work or school is a common sign of addiction. Your loved one may abandon work and school responsibilities in order to use drugs or to drink. Individuals who are addicted often lack motivation and, depending on the type of substance addiction, they may appear lethargic or “spaced out.” Skipping class or an important meeting, failure to complete projects on time (or at all), and general poor performance are common symptoms of addiction. If your loved one lives with you, he or she may even ask you to provide excuses to the boss or teachers as to why he or she is running late or unable to fulfill responsibilities. Resist the urge to excuse their behavior; doing so will only enable their addiction.



## #8: ENGAGING IN SECRETIVE OR SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIORS

Does your loved one mysteriously disappear for long periods or perhaps stay in the bedroom or house rather than go out? If you are suspicious about his or her behavior, there’s probably a good reason! Your loved one may become defensive or angry or even try to blame you when you confront him or her about these sudden changes. For example, teenagers and college students may suddenly drop one group of friends for another and become secretive about this new group.



## #9: UNEXPLAINED NEED FOR MONEY OR FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Does your loved one frequently ask to borrow money, or worse, have you caught your loved one stealing cash or belongings? Individuals who are addicted to drugs or alcohol can spend a great deal of money very rapidly in order to support these addictions. Consequently, even if your loved one is employed at a good job, he or she may always seem to be short on cash or trying to borrow money from friends and family. You may discover that you are missing cash, credit cards, jewelry, or other valuables.





## #10: USING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL TO AVOID WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

Individuals who are addicted will not only have built up tolerances to their substances of choice, but they also need more of this substance in order to avoid unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. For example, if your loved one goes too long without using, he or she may experience symptoms such as restlessness, insomnia, depression, nausea, anxiety, shaking, and sweating. These are common drug withdrawal symptoms. Consequently, your loved one will continue to abuse drugs or alcohol not simply to “get high or drunk,” but also because the withdrawal symptoms are so painful.

If your loved one shows any of these signs of addiction, the best thing that you can do to help is to motivate him or her to seek treatment. Every day matters; seeking treatment for drug or alcohol abuse is the best way to stop or reverse serious physical damage to the body and to help your loved one live a sober life.



## NEXT STEPS: HELPING YOUR LOVED ONE SEEK TREATMENT

Acknowledging a loved one's addiction can be difficult and painful. However, failure to acknowledge the addiction – especially when the signs of addiction are obvious – means that you are ultimately enabling your loved one's substance abuse. By ignoring the signs of addiction and looking the other way, it enables your loved one to continue using drugs without suffering the negative consequences of their actions.

Examples of enabling behavior include making excuses for your loved one's behavior to friends and family, giving or loaning a loved one money, helping a loved one purchase drugs or alcohol, and accepting a loved one's excuses and denials. When a loved one says that he or she can “quit at any time” and you accept this excuse, you are ultimately enabling this destructive behavior.

You cannot force your loved one to stop abusing drugs or alcohol. However, by recognizing the signs of addiction, you can take the first steps toward helping your loved one receive medical intervention and the necessary care.

While addiction is a disease, that doesn't mean there is nothing you can do to help your loved one. Some individuals may know that they need to seek treatment, but they are simply unable to manage the logistics of actually entering a treatment center. You can help by locating nearby treatment centers and discussing these options with your loved one.

Additionally, keep in mind that treatment does not always have to be voluntary to be successful. Individuals who enter treatment because it is ordered by the courts or required by an employer often benefit just as much from treatment programs as individuals who choose to enter rehab on their own accord.

On any given day, more than 700,000 Americans seek treatment for alcohol or drug addiction, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.



## CONTINUED SUPPORT AFTER TREATMENT: SIGNS OF A RELAPSE

Recovery from addiction is a long-term process. Even with your support, your loved one will not be magically sober overnight. Depending on the severity of your loved one's addiction, he or she may need extended care at an inpatient rehabilitation center, as well as ongoing aftercare following discharge. You can help support your loved one's treatment by maintaining a supportive drug and alcohol-free environment.

Additionally, it is important that you remain vigilant for the signs of substance abuse. A sudden change in behavior, such as skipping counseling sessions or outpatient care meetings, may signal that your loved one is slipping back to old behaviors.

Just as your loved one may have engaged in suspicious behaviors before entering a treatment center, be vigilant for a return to those behaviors. Watch out for mood swings, a change in friendships (or a return to spending time with friends who once enabled substance abuse), changes in appearance, persistent tardiness, or other warning symptoms of addiction.

If you suspect that a loved one is using drugs or alcohol, take action. Talk to your loved one about his or her behavior and reach out to a treatment center or substance abuse specialist. Every day matters. By recognizing the signs of addiction and taking action, you can help your loved one get back on the path toward sobriety.

