

DRUG DEPENDENCE

People use drugs for different reasons, including:

- + For fun and to celebrate
- + To deal with things like stress or sadness
- + Because everyone else is doing it
- + To make sex better
- + For pain relief.

Some people who inject drugs are not dependent on them and have a good deal of control over their use.

Some people have much less control, and some very little control at all.

Dependence, commonly called addiction, can be physical, psychological or both:

- + When someone needs a drug to function normally
- + When someone finds it very difficult to stop, even when it's causing them harm.

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

A Needle and Syringe Program (NSP or the exchange) worker can give you information, help you find services and make appointments for you.

DirectLine

1800 888 236 • www.directline.org.au
24-hour. If you want to talk to someone about your drug use or find a support service.

Counselling Online

www.counsellingonline.org.au

Understand Ice

www.understandice.org.au

Agency details:

SAFER
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DRUGS AND YOUR BRAIN

The natural chemicals in your brain allow you to move through the world and to interact with it. To think, to understand things, to move, to feel happy, sad, content, love.

Some drugs work on these chemicals, especially one chemical called dopamine.

Dopamine is in your brain to get you to do life affirming things like eating or having sex again and again.

It does this by giving you a reward when you do them – it gives you pleasure. Dopamine = pleasure, or to put it a different way: you do something, it feels good, you want to feel good again, so you do it again.

If you use a drug repeatedly it messes with the levels and production of dopamine and other chemicals and changes the way your brain works.

When this happens the need for that drug can take over and other things get left behind.

It is easy to underestimate how much you are taking and how much control the drugs have over you.

These are some of the signs that your drug use is getting out of your control:

- Ignoring family responsibilities or pulling away from family or friends
- Having more fights with your family or friends
- Not paying bills or building up debts
- Lying to those around you about how much you are using
- Putting getting stoned before family or friends
- Using during the week to get over the weekend
- Reduced performance at work or study
- Missing work or appointments or other commitments.

If your drug use is causing you a lot of problems, you might want to start thinking about how much you use.

Whether it is prescription drugs like pain killers or benzos, or illegal drugs like heroin or ice, there's no exact time or set of circumstances when you can spot exactly when drug use goes from something you're in control of and becomes dependence.

- You might start by using every now and then
- Over time, you might use more, or more frequently, to get the same effect
- You use to get over the comedowns and you're back in a session, with another comedown
- The drug becomes more important to you and you think a lot more about drugs than you used to
- You start going into withdrawal when you don't use
- After a time, you can find it difficult to think clearly, feel good or control your behaviour without that drug.

Signs you or someone you care about could have a dependence on a drug

- Always needing more of a drug to get the same effect
- Taking more of a drug or for longer than planned
- Spending a lot of time and effort getting drugs
- Going into withdrawal when you stop using, or you keep using to avoid withdrawal
- Thinking a lot about cutting down or stopping but it doesn't work out
- Giving up or cutting back on important things like family, work or sport
- Keeping on using even though it's causing you a lot of problems.

What should you do if you think you might be dependent on a drug?

It's hard to do, but think honestly about what and why you're using and what you want to do about it.

It's never a good idea to try to stop or cut down using a drug on your own. The more support you can get, the better your chances of things working out well.

Talking to someone you trust is important.

It's best if you talk to someone you know will take your worries seriously and will be practical about it – not someone who will judge you or who you might end up arguing with.

Getting professional support is also important. The quicker you get help, the quicker you can start working on the problem.

It's a good idea to speak to a GP or an alcohol and other drug worker before you try to make changes to your drug use, so they can help you manage any withdrawal symptoms you might have.

There are services that can help you:

DirectLine www.directline.org.au

Counselling Online www.counsellingonline.org.au

Local alcohol and other drug services.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Many people who try, do get control over their drug use or stop using completely. Sometimes it can take weeks, months or longer to fully get over your drug use, so you need to plan.

It can take many attempts and trying different things until you find what's right for you. Don't be too hard on yourself if things don't work out the first time.

A doctor might prescribe other medicines to help come off other drugs.

The more information you get before you start to make changes to your drug use, the better you'll manage those changes.

There are substitution medications for some drugs like heroin or morphine. There is more about this in the brochure titled 'Methadone and Suboxone®'.

There is information on reducing or stopping drug use in the brochure titled 'Cutting Down, Getting Off'.
