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Depression And Substance Abuse

When people are depressed, they may experience other health or mental health problems. To relieve the misery of depression, some people turn to drugs or alcohol. Likewise, when people abuse alcohol and/or drugs, depression can develop. On the surface, it may seem like a good idea – to get high, to have fun, to relax, and to escape – but the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse soon become apparent in your life. Like depression, alcohol and drug abuse is serious. Fortunately, it is also treatable and the **key to treatment is to recognize the symptoms and to get help**. Take a look at this basic information about the connection between alcohol and/or drug abuse and depression.

The Basics of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

• **Alcohol abuse does lasting damage.** One night of heavy drinking can impair your ability to think well for up to 30 days. Tens of thousands of today's college students will eventually die of alcohol-related causes, such as accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, heart disease and other diseases. Women are also more likely to develop alcohol-related organ damage, developing liver disease sooner than men, and perhaps increasing the risk for breast cancer.

• **Behavioral changes and consequences of drug abuse** may include changes in overall personality, depression, declining grades, loss of interest in family and friends, over-sensitivity, moodiness, nervousness, paranoia, secretive or suspicious behavior, and excessive talkativeness. Often people also experience difficulty in paying attention, and a general lack of motivation and energy, sometimes characterized by a "who cares" attitude.

• **Physical changes associated with drug abuse** are often changes in eating habits, lack of physical coordination, puffy face, hyperactivity, tremors, excessive sweating, runny nose or hacking cough.

• **Alcohol abuse can compromise your personal safety.** As many as 70% of college students admit to having engaged in sexual activity as a result of alcohol influence, and 90% of all campus rapes occur when alcohol has been used by either the victim or the assailant. Alcohol lowers inhibitions, and can make people more vulnerable to troublesome situations. When women drink alcohol they are more easily impaired than men, because of the way their body absorbs the alcohol. People's perceptions of potentially dangerous situations often change when alcohol or drugs are involved.

Are You Abusing Alcohol or Drugs? Some Hard Questions

Here are some questions to ask yourself about your use of alcohol and/or drugs. If you answer "yes" to most of them, then you're probably using too much:

- Is your personality different when you drink or do drugs?
- Do you drink or do drugs to gain courage to face social situations?
- Has your drinking or drug use ever caused you to miss class or appointments?
- Do you use alcohol or drugs as escapes when you are upset?
- Is it hard for you to stop drinking after you have one or two drinks?
- Do you always end up drunk, once you start drinking?

- Have you tried, and failed, to drink less alcohol or drink none at all?
- Have you tried and failed to cut down or stop using illicit drugs?
- Do you sometimes have trouble remembering what you did while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs? Do you regret doing some of the things you do remember?
- Have friends or family members tried to express their concern about your drinking or drug use?
- Has your classwork suffered because of your drinking or drug use?
- Have you needed a drink in the morning to get going after a night of heavy drinking?

Getting Help

To find help or more information, start with your student health center or counseling service on campus, or a local Mental Health Association. In addition to those services and the organizations listed below, ask friends and family for help and support. Most people who care about you will be glad to support your efforts to reduce your drinking or drug use.

- Mental Health Association in Milwaukee County: www.mhamilw.org
- National Mental Health Association: www.nmha.org; www.mpoweryouth.org
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment: <http://csat.samhsa.gov>
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information: 800-729-6686
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence: www.ncadd.org
- Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org
- Women for Sobriety: www.womenforsobriety.org
- Facts on Tap – Alcohol and Your College Experience: www.factsontap.org
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: www.nida.nih.gov; www.clubdrugs.org
- 800-DRUGHELP; www.drughelp.org
- The BACCHUS and GAMMA Peer Education Network: www.bacchusgamma.org
- National Women's Health Information Center: www.4woman.gov
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