

## Substance Abuse

Substance abuse affects an estimated 25 million Americans. In terms of people who are affected indirectly such as families of abusers and those injured or killed by intoxicated drivers, an additional 40 million people are affected. The monetary cost to society and the economy because of reduced productivity, property damage, accidents, and health care are astounding. Alcoholism is a progressive disease and afflicts 10 million adults and 3 million children. An estimated 12.5 million Americans are addicted to other drugs such as sedative-hypnotics or barbiturates, opiates, sedatives, hallucinogens and psychostimulants.

There are many symptoms and warning signs of substance abuse including: using the substance on a regular basis (daily, weekends or in binges), tolerance for the substance, failed attempts to stop using the substance, physical and/or psychological dependence, withdrawal symptoms (delirium tremens, trembling, hallucinations, sweating and high blood pressure), and in some cases dementia.

The specific causes of substance abuse are unclear, though they seem to be a combination of hereditary, environmental and social factors.

Treatment of substance abuse is geared towards abstinence and includes a variety of therapies. Psychotherapy aids patients in understanding behavior and motivations and in developing self-esteem and coping with stress. Self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous are very effective in helping the patient establish a support network. In some cases medications such as disulfiram (Antabuse) or methadone may be used with some success.

Information compiled from: "Facts About: Substance Abuse", American Psychiatric Association, 1400 K Street NW, Washington DC 20005.

*Source: Mental Health America.*