



## FIVE MYTHS ABOUT DRUG ABUSE AND ADDICTION

**Myth 1: Overcoming addiction is simply a matter of willpower. You can stop using drugs if you really want.**

**Fact:** Prolonged exposure to drugs alters the brain in ways that result in powerful cravings and a compulsion to use. These brain changes make it extremely difficult to quit by sheer force of will.

**Myth 2: Addiction is a disease; there's nothing that can be done about it.**

**Fact:** Most experts agree that addiction is a disease that affects the brain, but that doesn't mean anyone is a helpless victim. The brain changes associated with addiction can be treated and reversed through therapy, medication, exercise, and other treatments.

**Myth 3: Addicts have to hit rock bottom before they can get better.**

**Fact:** Recovery can begin at any point in the addiction process—and the earlier, the better. The longer drug abuse continues, the stronger the addiction becomes and the harder it is to treat. Don't wait to intervene until the addict has lost everything.

**Myth 4: You can't force someone into treatment; they have to want help.**

**Fact:** Treatment doesn't have to be voluntary to be successful. People who are pressured into treatment by their family, employer, or the legal system are just as likely to benefit as those who choose to enter treatment on their own. As they sober up and their thinking clears, many formerly resistant addicts decide they want to change.

**Myth 5: Treatment didn't work before, so there's no point trying again.**

**Fact:** Recovery from drug addiction is a long process that often involves setbacks. Relapse doesn't mean that treatment has failed or that sobriety is a lost cause. Rather, it's a signal to get back on track, either by going back to treatment or adjusting the treatment approach.

### WARNING SIGNS THAT A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER IS ABUSING DRUGS

Drug abusers often try to conceal their symptoms and downplay their problem. If you're worried that a friend or family member might be abusing drugs, look for the following warning signs:

#### Physical warning signs of drug abuse

- Bloodshot eyes, pupils larger or smaller than usual
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Deterioration of physical appearance, personal grooming habits
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing
- Tremors, slurred speech, or impaired coordination

#### Behavioral warning signs of drug abuse

- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school
- Unexplained need for money or financial problems; may borrow or steal to get it

- Engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors
- Sudden change in friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies
- Frequently getting into trouble (fights, accidents, illegal activities)

#### Psychological warning signs of drug abuse

- Unexplained change in personality or attitude
- Sudden mood swings, irritability, or angry outbursts
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity, agitation, or giddiness
- Lack of motivation; appears lethargic or "spaced out"
- Appears fearful, anxious, or paranoid, with no reason

## When a loved one has a drug problem

If you suspect that a friend or family member has a drug problem, here are a few things you can do:

**Speak up.** Talk to the person about your concerns, and offer your help and support without being judgmental. The earlier addiction is treated, the better. Don't wait for your loved one to hit bottom! List specific examples of your loved one's behavior that have you worried.

**Take care of yourself.** Don't get so caught up in someone else's drug problem that you neglect your own needs. Make sure you have people you can talk to and lean on for support. Stay safe. Don't put yourself in dangerous situations.

**Avoid self-blame.** You can support a person with a substance abuse problem and encourage treatment, but you can't force an addict to change. You can't control your loved one's decisions. Letting the person accept responsibility for his or her actions is an essential step along the way to recovery.

### Don't...

- Attempt to punish, threaten, bribe, or preach.
- Try to be a martyr. Avoid emotional appeals that may only increase feelings of guilt and the compulsion to use drugs.
- Cover up or make excuses for the drug abuser, or shield them from the negative consequences of their behavior.
- Take over their responsibilities, leaving them with no sense of importance or dignity.
- Hide or throw out drugs.
- Argue with the person when they are high.
- Use drugs with them.
- Feel guilty or responsible for another's behavior.



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