

The fact that you've reached for this pamphlet says you may wonder about your relationship with alcohol or other drugs. Perhaps you find it difficult to cut back on your use, or you do things when you're drunk or high that you later regret. You also may have reached for this pamphlet with a loved one in mind.

Whatever the reason, this pamphlet will help you gain a better understanding of when a person's alcohol or other drug use has reached a point where treatment may be required. It begins by explaining what trained professionals look for when trying to determine if someone has an addiction or substance abuse problem. It then offers two sets of questions to help a person evaluate his or her drinking or drugging patterns and concludes with resources someone can turn to if alcohol or drugs have become a problem for themselves or for a loved one.

But a note of caution: The purpose of this pamphlet is not to diagnose a substance abuse problem. Only a qualified professional, such as a doctor or counselor, can make such a diagnosis. The conclusions you draw from reading this pamphlet may lead you to seek assistance from just such a qualified professional.

What is an addiction?

The prevailing medical source on the subject, the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* or *DSM*, defines addiction (also called "substance dependence") as a pattern of alcohol or other drug use marked by at least *three* of the following conditions:

- needing more of the substance to achieve the desired high (called "increased tolerance")
- feeling uncomfortable after abstinence from the substance (called "withdrawal")

- using the substance in greater amounts or for a longer amount of time than intended
- not being able to cut down or control use of the substance
- continuing to use the substance despite knowing that use is causing physical or psychological problems
- giving up social, recreational or work-related responsibilities to allow more time for drinking or drugging
- spending more time planning the next drinking or drugging episode

Someone with three or more of these signs may have an addiction problem. This person should contact a qualified professional for further information and assistance.

What is substance abuse?

This same resource, the *DSM*, also offers a definition of substance abuse. Not everyone who drinks or does drugs has a substance abuse problem, but some people with a substance abuse problem go on to develop an addiction.

Substance abuse is defined as a pattern of alcohol or other drug use marked by at least one of the following conditions:

- continuing to use alcohol or other drugs despite the fact that use leads to social or interpersonal problems
- using substances when such use is hazardous (for example, drinking and driving or operating heavy machinery)
- failing to meet work, school or family responsibilities (for example, repeated work absences due to drinking or being kicked out of school for using drugs)
- having legal problems related to use of the substance

Someone who meets one of these conditions has a substance abuse problem, according to the *DSM*. That person is encouraged to contact a qualified professional for further information and assistance.

CAGE: A Self-Test for Alcohol Problems

The following four-question self-test was developed by the Rutgers University Center on Alcohol Studies in New Brunswick, NJ. The questions can be remembered best by the acronym CAGE. Someone who answers yes to any two CAGE questions is encouraged to contact an appropriate healthcare professional for assistance.

- C** Have you ever felt that you should **cut down** on your drinking?
- A** Have you been **annoyed** by people who criticize your drinking?
- G** Have you ever felt bad or **guilty** about your drinking?
- E** Have you ever taken a drink first thing in the morning (called an "**eye opener**") to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

Self-Test for Alcohol or Other Drug Problems

Interviews with people who've sought counseling for an alcohol or other drug problem show that a somewhat predictable pattern of behaviors develops with time. Some of these behaviors are more serious than others. For instance, drinking and driving is far more dangerous than drinking alone at home. But all such substance-related behaviors point to an overriding concern — that alcohol or other drugs may be gradually taking control of the person's life.

The 15 questions that follow could indicate a loss of control over alcohol or other drugs. One "yes" answer is reason to be alert to the possibility that alcohol or drugs have become a problem. The likelihood of a serious problem increases with each succeeding yes. Answer all questions with complete honesty. To be anything but honest on a self-test is a form of denial, and denial is another sign that alcohol or other drug use has become a problem.

- Do you frequently use alcohol or other drugs by yourself?
- Has your tolerance increased? In other words, do you have to use more of the substance to reach your desired high?
- Do you find it hard to cut back on your drinking or drugging even though you've made a promise to yourself that you will?
- Are you experiencing problems at work or at school because of your substance use?
- Do you find yourself using alcohol or other drugs more regularly, such as every weekend or every time you're with friends?
- Do you turn to alcohol or other drugs to get away from problems at home or on the job?
- Is there a history of alcoholism or drug addiction in your family?
- Have you ever tried to control your drinking or drug use by changing jobs, moving or ending a relationship?
- When you're drinking or drugging, do you do things that you later regret?
- Do you sometimes drink or use drugs for several days at a time?
- Are you purposefully mixing drugs, such as using marijuana or cocaine with alcohol?
- Have you been in trouble with the law because of your drinking or drugging?

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE SELF-ASSESSMENT

- Has someone close to you said that you get drunk or high too often? Did this annoy you?
- Do you believe that you have to drink or use drugs in order to have a good time?
- Have you ever had a black-out (having no recollection of what happened) while you were drinking or drugging?

If you're concerned about your relationship with alcohol or other drugs after taking the CAGE or 15-question self-test, talk to someone.

Help is available

Just talking about your problems sometimes leads to new solutions. If you or someone you know needs information, guidance or help, contact the resource and number listed below or look in the yellow pages for local professionals who can help.



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