

Patients - Addiction

Addiction and Substance Use | Information for Parents

What is addiction?

We throw the word addiction around regularly; people might say they're "addicted" to reality television or chocolate. In reality, addiction is a treatable, chronic illness. People with addiction will continue to use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite the risk involved. You might be experiencing addiction if:

- There is a particular substance (drug, alcohol) that you cannot stop using.
- Even though the substance is causing problems for you, you continue to pursue it and use it.
- The longer you use it, the more you want to use it.
- You may need to use more of the substance to get the same effect.
- You try to minimize the problems the substance is causing in your life.

Common substances of abuse include:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Marijuana
- Stimulants like cocaine, methamphetamine
- Sedatives, hypnotics and anxiolytics (medicines for anxiety such as tranquilizers)
- Opioid painkillers such as codeine, oxycodone, heroin
- PCP, LSD, and other hallucinogens
- Inhalants, such as paint thinners and glue

Substance use vs. addiction

There are people who are able to use certain drugs or alcohol without getting addicted. The majority of people who drink alcohol are not alcoholics. Some people can use marijuana or cocaine on occasion; when it is not around, they don't even think about using. However, if you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, or you are feeding your baby your breastmilk, we strongly recommend that you do not use any substances.

What happens if I use drugs or alcohol during pregnancy?

How you or your baby can be affected depends on what substance is used. The possible problems that may happen during pregnancy include:

- Placenta may detach from the uterus

- The fetus can die
- Infection
- The fetus may not grow appropriately
- The fetus passes stool while in utero
- Preeclampsia or toxic pregnancy
- Premature labor and delivery
- Water may break early
- Placenta does not work appropriately
- Miscarriage
- Postpartum bleeding
- Blood clots
- Fetal alcohol syndrome

Little is known about how substances can impact an infant when a mother is breastfeeding and using illicit substances. Research has suggested the following:

- Marijuana usage may cause delayed motor development at 1 year.
- Alcohol may reduce milk ejection and may disrupt the infant's sleep cycle.
- Nicotine from cigarettes enters breast milk and may impact development.
- Second-hand smoke also places infants at greater risk of SIDS.
- Methadone and opiates may lead to sedation and respiratory depression in the nursing infant.

How will they know I'm using?

PEACE for Moms recommends universal screening for substance use disorders for all pregnant patients. The medical team is not picking on you if they ask you to complete a survey about substance use. They just want to make sure that you and your baby receive the best care.

It is important that you are honest when asked about your substance usage. Be sure to share with your team about what you have been using and how much you have used. They will want to know about problems that have happened because of your use and if you have been treated for substance use.

People with substance abuse disorders often have other psychiatric problems. Treating the underlying illness may help you stop using drugs or alcohol. These issues can include:

- Depressive disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Anxiety disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Eating disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

Treatment Options

There are many factors to consider when deciding how to treat substance use disorders. The person's age, what substance they abuse, how much they use, how long they have used it, and the length of time it has been used will all be under consideration. Treatment may include going to a substance abuse treatment program. Others may find help at a program like NA or AA. Some people require medication to remain clean and sober. Your team will help you make the right choices.