



Substance Dependence



Overview

This is a physical condition. It's a change in your brain after you use a drug over and over again. Nerve cells in your brain, called "neurons," get used to the drug. They adapt to it. These cells begin to need the drug to function normally. And taking the drug away causes discomfort or pain. We call this "withdrawal."

Causes

You can become dependent on a drug with regular use even if you use it responsibly. If you need a cup of coffee to start your day, you may be dependent on caffeine. You can be dependent on other legal drugs, such as nicotine, alcohol and prescription medications. Use of illegal drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine can also create a dependency. Dependence, especially on illegal drugs, can have severe consequences.

Symptoms

If you are dependent on a drug, you feel like you need it even if you know it's bad for you. You may need to use more and more of the drug to get the same feeling you once did. You may spend a lot of time getting, using and recovering from the drug. And, if you don't use it, you feel unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms depend on the drug you use.

Treatment

Treatment options depend on your needs. You may benefit from counseling and from support groups. You may benefit from medications. You may need to be treated for an underlying condition, such as depression. You may need long term followup care to prevent a relapse. Your healthcare provider can create a plan that's right for you.

Actor portrayals in photos

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