



Use or Abuse?

Recognizing Dependency



Dependence on alcohol or other drugs is a widespread problem. Many times, people don't recognize it. Chemical dependency is simply the inability to control the use of some physical substance—not being able to quit and not being able to limit how much is used. If you have a dependency problem, recognizing it can help you to move toward a happier and healthier life.

Myths

You might think of a chemically dependent person as someone who can't live without their drink or drugs, who is often drunk or stoned, who uses every day or is irresponsible, immoral, weak-willed or bad. The fact is, a person can be chemically dependent without showing such obvious signs. We are gradually beginning to realize that a person's genetic makeup may affect his or her chances of becoming dependent, and that dependency is often a physical condition that can't be cured by willpower alone.

Symptoms of Dependency

Here are some signs that might indicate a chemical dependency problem in you or someone you love:

- ◆ trying to cut down on or to quit using some substance and failing at it
- ◆ “blackouts,” or lapses of memory after use
- ◆ using the substance while alone or hiding the evidence of use
- ◆ using the substance to forget about problems or worries
- ◆ doing things while “under the influence” that cause regret afterward
- ◆ not being able to enjoy an event without the substance
- ◆ neglecting responsibilities in order to use the substance
- ◆ family, friends or employer expressing concern about substance use
- ◆ being willing to do almost anything to get the substance
- ◆ financial or legal problems from using the substance

Problems Caused by Dependency

Chemically dependent people often act unwisely or inappropriately while under the influence of their drug. They may act in ways that will

embarrass them later. They may endanger their health and lives, and the lives of others, by having unsafe sex or by driving while intoxicated. They may lose their jobs or families as people around them are hurt by their actions.

What to Do

Recognizing that there's a problem is the first step toward recovering from chemical dependency. If you think you might have a problem of this type, here are some steps you can take:

- ◆ Acknowledge the problem openly.
- ◆ Limit time spent with people who encourage drug use or drinking.
- ◆ Seek professional help from doctors or therapists who deal with chemical dependency and recovery. You might benefit from counseling or a recovery program at a hospital or private clinic.
- ◆ Seek out the support of people who are recovering themselves. Many 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, are available for various types of dependencies. Your employee assistance program can help you find these and other helpful resources or check your phone book.