

Substance Use and Your Mental Health

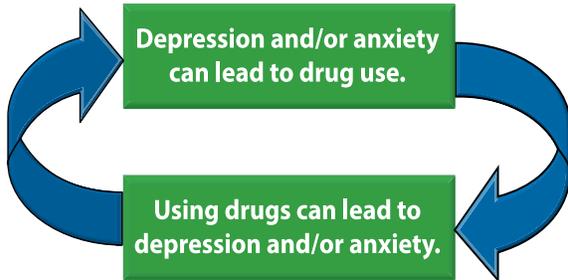
Matt's Story

When Matt tried alcohol, it relaxed him for awhile but he didn't understand until much later that alcohol had made his problems worse. "When I stopped drinking, I was angry and anxious. I even punched the wall. I hated myself and wanted to be drunk all the time."

If you, your friends or family think your drug use is a problem, take it seriously and get some help.

Introduction

A drug is any substance that changes the way you naturally think, act and feel. This includes caffeine, tobacco products, alcohol, cannabis and codeine. All drugs can be misused even if they are a prescribed by a doctor or purchased over the counter.



You might try drugs because you are curious or it seems like a fun thing to do with friends. For many teens who try, it never develops into a problem. But, if you are using drugs to cope or if your drug use is causing problems at school, home, work, in your relationships or with the law, you might have a problem.

How is drug use connected to depression, anxiety and mental illness?

- Some teens use drugs to help them cope with symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Teens that experience depression and/or anxiety are more likely to use drugs.
- For teens that have a predisposition to mental illness, drug use can trigger a mental health problem or make an existing problem worse.
- Brain development continues into the mid twenties, using drugs can alter brain development and lead to mental illness later in life.

If you use drugs and have depression and/or anxiety, you may start to feel worse, lose interest in things, eat and sleep too much or too little, not want to hang out with certain family and friends, take risks and even think about suicide.

Thoughts of Suicide and Self-harm

If you feel so down that you can't see any solutions besides harming yourself or harming others, get help right away. Call **911** or go to the nearest emergency department.

Treating Addiction

Most of the time, you will start by seeing a doctor to determine what is going on. This may include talking to a mental health and/or addiction clinician and coming up with a plan. They will ask about your symptoms, any recent stressful events, current alcohol or drug use and any medications/over the counter supplements that you have taken.

It does not matter which comes first, depression and/or anxiety and drug use, these issues should be treated at the same time.

It's important to try to be honest about your drug use with your health care professional so he or she can best know how to help you. The best treatment outcomes usually happen when you can be open and can share anything with your health care professional. If you are not comfortable with the person you are seeing, it's okay to ask for someone else.

Will my family be involved in my treatment?

Yes, your parents or caregiver will be involved in some decisions about treatment options. It's often helpful to have your family involved but this will depend on your circumstances. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about how much your family will be involved in your treatment.

Drug use can make you less likely to do things for yourself that can help you. In addition to what your health care professional suggests, here are some suggestions to look after yourself on a day-to-day basis:

- avoid situation where you may be tempted to use drugs
- eat healthy
- be active and to get enough sleep
- practice stress reduction techniques (e.g., yoga, listening to music, deep breathing etc.)
- try something creative (e.g., writing, art, dance, etc.)
- talk to someone you trust—a friend, parent, teacher or a health care professional
- read about addiction, depression and/or anxiety (e.g., bibliotherapy)

Getting Help

It takes courage to ask for help. If you don't know where to turn or you want speak to someone in private, you can call:
(available in Alberta 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Mental Health Help Line: **1-877-303-2642**

Kids Help Phone: **1-800-668-6868**

Addiction Help Line: **1-866-332-2322**

Health Link: **811**

Helpful Websites

www.kidshelpphone.ca

www.kidshealth.org

www.mindyoumind.ca

[substanceusetoolkit](#) (developed by mindyourmind)