

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

General Patient Information

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Psychoactive substance use can lead to dependence syndrome - a cluster of behavioral, cognitive, and physiological phenomena that develop after repeated substance use and that typically include a strong desire to take the drug, difficulties in controlling its use, persisting in its use despite harmful consequences, a higher priority given to drug use than to other activities and obligations, increased tolerance, and sometimes a physical withdrawal state.

- The harmful use of alcohol results in 3.3 million deaths each year.
- On average every person in the world aged 15 years or older drinks 6.2 litres of pure alcohol per year.
- Less than half the population (38.3%) actually drinks alcohol, this means that those who do drink consume on average 17 litres of pure alcohol annually.
- Some 31 million persons have drug use disorders.
- Almost 11 million people inject drugs, of which 1.3 million are living with HIV, 5.5 million with hepatitis C, and 1 million with both HIV and hepatitis C.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a psychoactive substance with dependence-producing properties that has been widely used in many cultures for centuries. The harmful use of alcohol causes a large disease, social and economic burden in societies. Environmental factors such as economic development, culture, availability of alcohol and the level and effectiveness of alcohol policies are relevant factors in explaining differences and historical trends in alcohol consumption and related harm.

Alcohol-related harm is determined by the volume of alcohol consumed, the pattern of drinking, and, on rare occasions, the quality of alcohol consumed. The harmful use of alcohol is a component cause of more than 200 disease and injury conditions in individuals, most notably alcohol dependence, liver cirrhosis, cancers and injuries. The latest causal relationships established are those between alcohol consumption and incidence of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

Other psychoactive substances

It is estimated that 275 million people used illicit drugs, such as cannabis, amphetamines, opioids, and cocaine, in 2016 which translates into an annual prevalence of illicit drug use of 5.6%. Cannabis is most used with 192 million users. Some 31 million of people who use drugs suffer from drug use disorders. It is estimated that there are almost 11 million people who inject drugs.

Resources

Please refer to Substance Abuse and Tobacco Abuse Resources Guides on our website for resources that are available for people seeking information and help.