

## Signs and Symptoms of Addiction

**Substance dependence is when a person is addicted to a substance, such as a drug, alcohol or nicotine and they are not able to control the use of that substance.**

**They continue taking it, even though it may cause harm. In fact, the individual may not even be aware of the potential harm or they might feel like they can manage the risk or cope with the harms it causes.**

**Substance dependence can cause powerful cravings. The addict may want to give up (quit), but they will find it extremely difficult to do so without help.**

**The signs and symptoms of substance dependence vary according to the individual, the substance they are addicted to, their family history (genetics), and personal circumstances.**

**A symptom is something the patient senses and describes, while a sign is something other people, such as a doctor or a person's loved ones might notice.**

**For example, sleepiness is a symptom while financial distress could be a sign.**

### **Signs and Symptoms of Substance Dependence**

- **The person takes the substance and cannot stop.** In many cases, such as nicotine, alcohol or drug dependence, at least one serious attempt was made to give up, but unsuccessfully.
- **Withdrawal symptoms.** When body levels of that substance go below a certain level the patient has physical and mood-related symptoms. There can be extreme cravings, bouts of moodiness, bad temper, poor focus, a feeling of being depressed and empty, frustration, anger, bitterness and resentment.

There may suddenly be increased appetite. Insomnia is a common symptom of withdrawal. In some cases the individual may have constipation or diarrhoea. With some substances, withdrawal can trigger violence, trembling, seizures, hallucinations, and sweats.

- **The individual continues taking the substance regularly,** even though they have developed illnesses linked to it. For example, a smoker may continue smoking even after a lung or heart condition develops.
- **Social and/or recreational sacrifices.** Some activities are given up because of an addiction to something. For example, an alcoholic may turn down an invitation to go camping or spend a day out on a boat if no alcohol is available, a smoker may decide not to meet up with friends in a smoke-free pub or restaurant. Someone who is addicted to an illicit substance may refuse to travel overseas or interstate because they won't be able to transport the substance or purchase it on arrival.
- **Maintaining a good supply.** People who are addicted to a substance will always make sure they have a good supply of it, even if they do not have much money. Sacrifices may be made in the household budget to make sure the substance they are addicted to remains as plentiful as possible.
- **Excess consumption.** In some addictions, such as alcohol, some drugs and even nicotine, the individual consumes it to excess. The consequence can be blackouts (cannot remember chunks of time) or physical symptoms, such as a sore throat and bad persistent cough (heavy smokers).



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### ***Behavioural and other changes caused by addiction***

- **Risk taking behaviours.** In some cases the addicted individual make take risks to make sure he/she can obtain the substance, such as stealing or trading sex for money or drugs. Separately, while under the influence of some substances the addict may engage in risky activities, such as driving recklessly or engaging in unprotected sex.
- **Using drugs or alcohol to deal with their problems.** An addicted person feels they need their drug to help them deal with the various problems and challenges that are a part of everyday life.
- **Obsession.** An addicted person may spend more and more time and energy focusing on ways of getting hold of their substance, and in some cases how to use it. They may adopt or embrace certain lifestyle or cultural and social changes that go with consumption of a particular substance so that they are more frequently able to consume the substance.
- **Secrecy and solitude.** In many cases though, the addict may take their substance alone, and even in secret. A sign of this is if they begin spending more and more time alone or apart from the family or if they appear unusually cagey or unreasonable about their personal belongings or space around the house.
- **Having stashes.** The addicted individual may have small stocks of their substance hidden away in different parts of the house or car; often in unlikely places. An alcoholic for example might even keep liquor at the homes of their friends and family 'just in case', so they aren't caught without it when they visit.
- **Dropping hobbies or activities.** As the addiction progresses, the individual may stop doing things he or she used to enjoy a lot. This may be the case with smokers who find they cannot physically cope with taking part in their favourite sport.
- **Denial.** A significant number of people who are addicted to a substance are in denial. They are not aware (or refuse to acknowledge) that they have a problem.
- **Taking an initial large dose.** This is common with alcoholism. The individual may gulp drinks down in order to get drunk quickly and then feel good.
- **Having problems with the law.** This is a characteristic of some drug and alcohol addictions (not nicotine, for example). This may be either because the substance impairs judgment and the individual takes risks they would not take if they were sober, or in order to get hold of the substance they break the law. The substance itself may be illegal, and therefore the process of buying it or possessing it exposes them to problems with the police.
- **Financial difficulties.** If the substance is expensive, the addicted individual may sacrifice a lot to make sure its supply is secured.
- **Relationship problems.** These are more common in drug/alcohol addiction.

### ***What Hunterlink can do***

We know it can be a daunting process to pick up the phone when you are already dealing with the impact of addiction, whether it's your own or a loved-one's, but please know that we are here for you 24/7 with our fully qualified and registered counsellors ready to help you anytime of the day or night.

We provide [confidential](#) telephone or face-to-face support sessions, as well as access to these services for immediate family members.

Remember, [you don't have to be in a crisis situation](#) to contact Hunterlink.

