

Substance Use – Use of alcohol, illicit drugs, or medications for non-medical reasons to change mood or consciousness.

Substance Use Disorder – A Substance Use Disorder can be diagnosed when a pattern of substance use leads to significant impairment or problems over a 12-month period or longer. Symptoms of a Substance Use Disorder include limited control over use, social impairment related to use, use in risky situations, and other symptoms such as tolerance and/or withdrawal.

- **Symptoms Common to Substance Use Disorders and Brain Injury:**

- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Change in mood or personality
- Memory problems
- Difficulty with balance and walking
- Impaired thinking (cognition), including decision-making and judgment
- Impulsivity (i.e., acting without considering consequences)
- Disinhibition (i.e., failing to “put the brakes on”)
- Lower frustration tolerance

- **Risks Associated with Substance Use after Brain Injury:**

- Medication Interactions-** Substances can decrease effectiveness and/or safety of medications. Some medications may not work as well or may not be safe to take when taken with other substances, such as drugs or alcohol.
- Interferes with healing-** Substance use can get in the way of the brain healing or cause more harm to the brain.
- Lower tolerance-** Brain injury lowers tolerance for substances. This means a small amount can have a greater effect than expected.
- Decreased inhibition-** Using substances impairs decision-making. When people are under the influence of substances, they may be less likely to make good choices and more likely to act on impulse.
- Increased risk of side effects-** Substance use may increase risk for seizures, depression, and problems with walking, speaking, balance, and more.

Talk to your pharmacist or doctor about any questions you have about side effects or medication interactions.

- **Risk Factors for Developing a Substance Use Disorder After Injury:**

- Having a Substance Use Disorder before brain injury
- Having immediate family members with Substance Use Disorders
- Social isolation or not feeling connected to others
- Boredom or having few activities or interests
- Spending time with a peer group that encourages substance use
- Easy access to substances
- Not getting needed medical or mental health care
- Family stress



- Difficulty adjusting to change
 - Not having helpful tools for managing stress
 - Cultural factors
- **Treatment for Substance Use Disorders while at Shepherd Center may include:**
 - Learning helpful stress management strategies and practicing new coping skills
 - Counseling with a psychologist, clinical social worker, or professional counselor
 - Referral to specialized treatment for Substance Use Disorders, if needed
 - Participation in peer-supported community recovery (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, SMART Recovery, Women for Sobriety, Secular Organizations for Sobriety, or others)
- **How Ongoing Substance Use Affects Families:**
 - Family members may experience a range of challenging emotions (fear, anger, sadness, guilt, etc.)
 - Family members may have trouble getting their own needs met
 - Families may experience increased arguments or trouble communicating
 - Family members may not know how to react to substance use
- **How Family Members Can Take Care of Themselves:**
 - Learn about Substance Use Disorders. Helpful websites for education are listed below.
 - Care for your own physical and psychological needs. Exercise, balance your diet, set and accomplish goals, maintain a healthy routine, etc. Consider connecting with your own therapist.
 - Find a community support group for concerned significant others (e.g. Al-Anon or another similar group)
- **How Family/ Friends Can Help a Loved One Using Substances:**
 - Gently remind the person how substance use can affect recovery from brain injury.
 - Call attention to your concerns by focusing on how things affect you using, "I statements," (e.g., "I feel powerless when I can't help you make healthier choices." ...or... "I feel hurt when I am ignored.")
 - Encourage your family member to speak with a medical professional about their substance use.
 - Set healthy boundaries – make them reasonable, specific, and enforceable and have specific consequences.
 - Engage in enjoyable activities with your loved one that do not involve substance use. Praise the actions that you do want to see, (e.g., "It meant a lot to me that you came to our daughter's play with me instead of going to the bar last night.")



- **Web-Based Resources for Education and Finding Support:**

- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); drugabuse.gov
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); samhsa.gov
- A guide for concerned parents or partners; the20minuteguide.com
- SMART Recovery; smartrecovery.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); nami.org

- **Helpful Books for Concerned Loved Ones:**

- *Beyond Addiction: How Science and Kindness Help People Change.* Foote, Wilkens, Kosanke, & Higgs, 2014.
- *Get Your Loved One Sober: Alternatives to Nagging, Pleading, and Threatening.* Meyers & Wolfe, 2003.



Additional Comments:

