



Signs and Symptoms of ADDICTIONS

Addiction can affect a person in several ways, leaving "clues" or signs that an issue may exist. These signs may appear in the form of engaging in certain behaviours, some are physical signs or symptoms, and others are present in one's emotional or mental states.

Here we discuss some of the most common behavioural, physical, and psychological signs of addiction to watch for if there is concern that a loved one may be facing addiction. We also explore some of the different types of addiction and the signs or symptoms that may be present with each.

Signs and Symptoms of Addiction

There are many different signs and symptoms of addiction. Signs are the things that can be observed by others while symptoms are what the person with addiction experiences. Each person's experience with addiction is unique, so some of these may be present while others are not.



Behavioural

Sometimes it is a person's behavior that cause us to worry about whether they may be facing a drug or alcohol addiction. Or they may engage in behaviours that suggest a possible addiction to certain actions, such as having an addiction to gambling, shopping, internet, video games, plastic surgery, binge eating/food addiction, thrill-seeking activities or sex. Individuals can form behavioural addictions similar to a dependence on drugs and alcohol to combat anxiety, depression or other mental health disorders. Increases in drug and alcohol use have signaled that many people are abusing harmful chemicals; however, some don't factor in non-substance addictions like food, sex, phone, video game, or gambling addiction, which often manifest as a behavioural addiction due to underlying mental health challenges. Those who become addicted due to specific activities seek out feelings of comfort, happiness, and chemical releases (dopamine and serotonin) or can form behavioural addictions to escape reality or painful emotions.



Behavioural signs of addiction include:

- Changes in social groups, new and unusual friends, or odd phone conversations.
- Frequent lying or secretiveness.
- Increased tolerance or the need to engage in the addiction more and more to get the desired effect.
- Spending a lot of time planning, engaging in, and recovering from the addictive behaviour.
- Repeated unexplained outings, often with a sense of urgency.
- Repeatedly using a substance or engaging in an activity even though it negatively affects the person's health, relationships, school, or work.
- Stealing
- Trouble fulfilling obligations or handling responsibilities.

Physical

Addiction can also affect a person's body, leaving physical symptoms. Physical symptoms or signs of addiction include:

- Changes in energy, such as being unexpectedly and extremely tired or energetic
- Changes in weight.
- More frequent illnesses.
- Sleeping a lot more or less than usual, or at different times of the day or night.
- Withdrawal symptoms when the addictive behaviour is stopped, such as muscle pain, sweating, and tremors.



Psychological

If a person displays certain mental or emotional attributes, it could also signify that addiction is present. Psychological signs or symptoms of addiction to watch for include:

- Cravings for the substance or activity.
- Difficulty cutting down or controlling the addictive behaviour.
- Extreme mood changes.
- Intense focus on or preoccupation with the addictive substance or action.
- Irritability or anxiousness if the substance or behaviour is stopped.

Other

Additional things that could signify that an addiction is present include:

- Finding drug paraphernalia, such as unusual pipes, cigarette papers, small weighing scales, etc.
- Finding stashes of drugs, often in small plastic, paper, or foil package.

We don't always know what someone is experiencing unless they tell us. That makes it helpful to know what to watch for if we're concerned that addiction may exist.



Signs of Specific Addictions

While there are signs and symptoms of a general nature, certain substances and behaviours can come with their own set of symptoms.

- Behaviours (gambling, exercise, sex, shopping): Behavioural addictions are characterised by compulsive behaviours that persist despite negative consequences.
- Depressants (alcohol, barbiturates, benzodiazepines): Depressant medications reduce the activity of the central nervous system and can lead to slowed heartbeat and respiration, confusion, coma, and death.
- Opioids (painkillers, heroin, morphine): These substances decrease sensitivity to pain and produce strong cravings for opioids.
- Stimulants (caffeine, nicotine, amphetamines, methamphetamine, cocaine): Stimulant substances lead to increased energy levels.



Addiction Complications and Comorbidities

Addictions have a wide range of serious complications, many of which can be life-limiting and potentially dangerous. That makes them things to watch for if addiction is suspected.

Complications of addiction include:

- Accidents
- Family problems
- Financial problems
- Health problems
- Legal issues
- Relationship problems
- School difficulties
- Suicidal ideation or attempts
- Work problems

Different substances can have their own set of health risks and potential complications. Illegal substances, for instance, pose health dangers in addition to potential legal issues. Some substances also pose a risk for overdose, brain damage, and long-term health consequences.



Mental health conditions

Addiction often occurs alongside other mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Estimates suggest that approximately half of all people with a mental disorder will also have a substance use disorder at some point during their lives.

Adolescence

Some signs of addiction are similar to normal teenage behaviour, but teenagers are also one of the groups most vulnerable to addiction. Parents who are worried that their child might be using substances can seek professional assistance to determine how to best manage this issue.

Life experiences

People who have or have had certain life experiences are also more likely to be affected by addiction. These include poverty, gender discrimination, poor schooling, and experiencing social injustices. People who have experienced trauma or abuse also have a higher risk of developing an addiction.



If addiction is suspected

It's important to note that most of the signs of addiction can have other explanations. People can have changes in their mood, behaviour, and energy levels for other reasons, including health-related ones. Be cautious about jumping to conclusions.

It is difficult to discern if someone may have an addiction, even if some obvious signs are observed. A healthcare provider or mental health professional can help identify if addiction exists, also providing guidance for treatment options.

If you or someone you love need help with addictions, contact Platinum Health Mental Health Services on 014 590 1700. EAP counselors (010 133 0525) are also available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to offer counselling and support.

Source: verywellmind
(www.verywellmind.com/symptoms-of-addiction)