

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER AND ADDICTION

Substance use disorder (SUD) and addictions are complex and challenging conditions. But recovery is possible with the right treatment plan.



Substance use disorder (SUD) and addiction affect all people, independent of their age, gender, or economic or social status. You may know someone who started taking pain relievers like opioids they were prescribed after an injury. Then, as their body experienced dependence, efforts to cut back or quit on their own proved to be extremely painful — or next to impossible. Regardless of how substance use begins, recovery is possible. Most people with moderate to severe addiction need additional help, however, as it's not easily overcome on your own.

What is substance use disorder?

Substance use disorder is a complex condition stemming from the recurrent use of alcohol or other substances despite the harmful life and health consequences it may cause.

A SUD can be mild, moderate, or severe.

Addiction often occurs when the substance over activates the brain's reward center, which involves an abnormally high release of the neurotransmitter dopamine.

Continued use of the substance results in changes to the brain's function and structure, which eventually leads to cravings, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms when the substance isn't used.

What are the different types of SUD?

Substances for which a person may form a SUD include:

- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- Hallucinogens (including LSD and PCP)
- Inhalants
- Opioids (including heroin and prescription medication)
- Sedatives, hypnotics (sleep meds), or anxiolytics (anti-anxiety meds)
- Stimulants (like amphetamines or cocaine)
- Tobacco

Addictions that don't involve drugs or alcohol may include:

- Gambling
- Sex or pornography
- Internet or social media
- Shopping
- Video games
- Food

Note that of these, only gambling disorder and internet gaming disorder are recognised behavioural addictions in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) [Trusted Source](#).

Still, even though they're not recognised diagnoses in the DSM-5, these other behaviours — like sex, social media, and shopping — many cause problems when done in excess or compulsively. No matter your concern, it's valid and you can seek professional help to address it.

Substance use disorder is an addiction that involves a habit-forming substance. This can include alcohol or any prescription or illegal drug.



An addiction is the compulsive and repeated use of a substance, or any behaviour or activity that a person feels helpless to stop.

What causes substance use disorder?



The exact causes of SUD are unknown. Some influencing factors include:

- Genetics
- Personality traits
- Stress
- The substance's action
- Family history of use
- Peer pressure
- Mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Exposure to trauma, especially in childhood, is strongly associated with substance use as well. In fact, SUDs are commonly seen in people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Studies with twins and families have shown that both genetic and environmental factors play a role in developing SUD.

What are the signs and symptoms of substance use disorder and addiction?

Signs and symptoms of substance use and addiction vary widely from person to person and depend on:

- The substance or behaviour
- The length and severity of use
- The user's personality



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Below are the general symptoms of substance use and addiction:

- Continued use even though it may affect health, relationships, or other aspects of life negatively
- Craving the substance or behaviour
- Regular overconsumption
- Worrying about overuse
- Using in situations that may not be safe, such as driving under the influence, using a syringe that's not sterile, or having sex without condoms or other barrier methods
- Giving up previously enjoyed activities due to use
- Spending a lot of time using or trying to use and recovering
- Neglecting responsibilities at home, work, or school
- Building up a tolerance
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when trying to quit

How is SUD diagnosed?

Most clinicians use the following DSM-5 criteria when diagnosing a substance use disorder:

- Feeling like you have to use the substance on a regular basis (daily or several times per day) and more than originally planned.

- Spending a large amount of time seeking, using, and recovering from the substance.
- Craving the substance.
- Needing more of the substance to get the same effect.
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when you don't use the substance.
- Neglecting responsibilities at home, work, or school.
- Recurring thoughts of quitting but being unable to accomplish this goal.



- Continuing to use despite problems it may cause in relationships.
- Continuing to use despite mental or physical health problems caused or worsened by it.
- Giving up or cutting back in social or recreational activities due to substance use.
- Using the substance under conditions that may not be safe.

Depending on how many of these symptoms a person shows within a 12-month period, a SUD can be diagnosed as:

- Mild: 2–3 symptoms
- Moderate: 4–5 symptoms
- Severe: 6 or more symptoms

How is substance use disorder treated?

Treatment for SUD may be delivered in two basic settings — inpatient and outpatient. The main goal is to place people in the most effective — but least restrictive — environment needed to begin the process and then move them along a continuum of care.





Various SUD treatment programmes stem from three basic models:

- **Medical model.** This approach emphasizes the biological, genetic, or physiological causes of the SUD. It requires treatment by a physician and using medication to relieve symptoms.
- **Psychological model.** This approach focuses on the person's potentially harmful motivations or emotional dysfunction as the primary cause of the SUD. It may include psychotherapy or behavioural therapy.
- **Sociocultural model.** This approach addresses any deficiencies in the person's social and cultural environment that can be improved by altering your physical and social environment, including the use of self-help or spiritual activities. Treatment is often facilitated by people with personal experience with addiction and who are also in recovery.

Source: <https://psychcentral.com/addictions/substance-use-disorder-symptoms>



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Get Help

Substance use disorder can affect anyone. Though SUD and addiction are challenging, recovery is possible with the right treatment plan and a support network by your side. If you find your substance use or certain behavioural habits are hard to control, consider reaching out to Platinum Health's Mental Health Services on **014 590 1700** or **080 000 6942**. EAP Counsellors (**010 133 0525**) are also available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to offer counselling and support.