Polysubstance Abuse

When people abuse more than one drug or type of drug it is called polysubstance or polydrug abuse. For example, many smokers also drink alcohol. This is one form of polydrug abuse. Polydrug abuse also refers to the use of a drug to counteract an unpleasant effect produced by another drug. It may also be used to help with withdrawal from another drug. People who take stimulants may become agitated. Sometimes this agitation is countered with a tranquilizer. This helps protect against the unpleasant side effects. Polydrug abuse also refers to the use of different drugs at the same time.

Anytime drug use is interfering with normal living activities, it has become abuse. This includes problems with family and friends. *Psychological dependence* has developed when your mind tells you that the drug is needed. This is usually followed by *physical dependence* which has developed when continuing increases of drug are required to get the same feeling or "high". This is known as **addiction** or **chemical dependency**. A person's risk is much higher if there is a history of chemical dependency in the family.

SIGNS OF CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY:

- You have been told by friends or family that drugs have become a problem.
- You fight when using drugs.
- You are having blackouts (not remembering what you do while using).
- You feel sick from using drugs but continue using.
- You lie about use or amounts of drugs (chemicals) used.
- You need chemicals to get you going.
- You are suffering in work performance or in school because of drug use.
- You get sick from use of drugs but continue to use anyway.
- You need drugs to relate to people or feel comfortable in social situations.
- You use drugs to forget problems.

Yes answered to any of the above signs of chemical dependency indicates there are problems. The longer the use of drugs continues, the greater the problems will become.

If there is a family history of drug or alcohol use, **it is best not to experiment** with these drugs. Continual use leads to tolerance. After tolerance develops more of the drug is needed to get the same feeling. This is followed by addiction. With addiction, drugs become the most important part of life. It becomes more important to take drugs than participate in the other usual activities of life. This includes relating to friends and family. Addiction is followed by dependency. Dependency is a condition where drugs are now needed not just to get high, but to feel normal.

Addiction cannot be cured but it can be stopped. This often requires outside help and the care of professionals. Treatment centers are listed in the yellow pages under: Cocaine, Narcotics, and Alcoholics Anonymous. Most hospitals and clinics can refer you to a specialized care center. Talk to your caregiver if you need help.

Document Released: 08/09/2006
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.