Opiate Dependence, Abuse
Narcotic, Heroin, Laudanum, Codeine, Morphine

The above names are all different names used for opiates. Opiates are any medication made from the poppy plant. It is a medication which produces a calming, sleepy effect. Because achieving this effect requires more and more of this drug to get the same result, opiates become addictive. A family history of addiction or an addictive personality increases the risk.

When drug use is interfering with normal living activities, it has become abuse. This includes problems with family, friends, and your job. Psychological dependence has developed when your mind tells you that the drug is needed. This emotional dependence is the craving for the "high" that some drugs cause. Emotional addicts always want this high instead of the way they are feeling when not using the drug. This is difficult to overcome. This is usually followed by physical dependence that has developed when continuing increases of drug are required to get the same feeling or "high". This is known as addiction or chemical dependency.

SIGNS OF CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

- Friends and family tell you there is a problem.
- Fighting when using drugs.
- Mood swings and insomnia.
- Forgetfulness.
- Not remembering what you do while using (blackouts).
- Feeling sick from using drugs but you continue using.
- Lie about use or amounts of drugs (chemicals) used.
- Need chemicals to get you going.
- Suffer in work performance or school because of drug use.
- Need drugs to relate to people or feel comfortable in social situations.
- Use drugs to forget problems.
- Difficulty with attention.
- Neglecting obligations.

If you answered "yes" to any or some of the above signs of chemical dependency, you may have a problem. The longer the use of drugs continues, the greater the problems will become. Do not experiment with drugs.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PHYSICAL DEPENDENCE

Sudden stopping of the narcotic is uncomfortable when tolerance has developed. Physical problems will develop. This is called withdrawal.
How bad the withdrawal is varies from person to person. Some of the smaller problems are:

- Tremors in the hands or shakes and jitters.
- A fast heart rate and rapid breathing.
- An increase in temperature.
- Anxiety and panic attacks with bad dreams.
- Muscle aches and pains.

You may have more serious problems. These can include:

- Feeling sick to your stomach or throwing up.
- Dehydration develops if you cannot keep fluids down.
- Tremors and chills or fever with sweating and anxiety.
- Hallucinations and cravings.
- Body aching with restlessness and insomnia.
- Seizures or convulsions.

These problems can last for months. These uncomfortable feeling can cause you to use drugs again just to feel better.

OTHER HEALTH RISKS OF NARCOTICS USE INCLUDE:

- The increased possibility of getting AIDS, hepatitis, other infectious or sexually transmitted diseases.
- Unplanned pregnancy and having a baby born addicted to narcotics. You then put your baby through painful withdrawal symptoms including: shaking, jerking, and crying in pain. Many babies die. Other babies have lifelong disabilities and learning problems.

TREATMENT

Effective treatment and management of narcotic addiction requires a multi-faceted, team approach that includes:

- Medications to minimize the symptoms of narcotic withdrawal.
- Medications to reduce the need for continued narcotic use.
- Medical management of unrelated medical problems.
- Pain management.
- Social services.
- Psychological treatment.
- Behavioral therapies.

Stopping your dependence is hard but may save your life. If you continue using drugs, the only possible outcome is loss of self respect and esteem, violence, and eventually prison or death. To stop abuse, you must first realize you have a problem. You control your behavior. Once you realize this, commit to quitting. Addiction is a disease. You need medical help to get well. Your caregiver can counsel you or refer you for counseling. The best way to do this is to seek out an organization for help. These include Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

HOW TO STAY CLEAN WHEN YOU HAVE QUIT USING

- Develop healthy activities.
- Form friendships with those who do not use drugs.
- Stay away from all drugs. Alcohol will lessen your ability to say no.
- Have ready excuses available about why you cannot use. If that is difficult, stay away from people who knew you used.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Both prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines are used as part of the treatment. It is critical to follow the recommendations of your caregiver at home. Any additional over-the-counter medications or changes in the recommended treatment plan should be discussed with your caregiver first.
- It is important to keep fluids down. Juices, soda, Gatorade, or a mixture will help prevent dehydration.
- Be prepared for the emotional swings of quitting.
- Call your local emergency services if seizures (*convulsions*) occur or if you are unable to keep liquids down.
- Keep a written record of medications you take and times given.

Overcoming addictions takes years. Over time you will have a lessening of the craving for narcotics. Talk to your caregiver or a member of your support group if you need more help.

Addiction cannot be cured but it can be stopped. 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.

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