

## Substance Abuse Awareness Initiative

Substance abuse, including drug and alcohol abuse, is prevalent throughout Ohio, within our communities and affects many State of Ohio employees, their spouses and their dependents. Throughout this year, the Ohio Employee Assistance Program (OEAP) is launching an initiative to bring awareness about substance abuse and to offer resources and tools.

Frontline Focus will feature stories about various substance abuse topics including recognizing signs, dealing with substance abuse and recovery. The substance abuse initiative will culminate at the annual OEAP Conference, which is tentatively scheduled for mid-September.

## Recognizing Substance Abuse and Dependency

Addiction is a widespread problem. The American Society on Addiction Medicine defines addiction as a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychological, social and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestation. Substance abuse is characterized by continuous or periodic drug and/or alcohol use. The American Medical Association recognized alcoholism as a disease in 1954 and drug addiction in 1972.

### Helpful Strategies

Some of the key concepts of addiction are:

**The disease is primary & chronic.** Addiction has nothing to do with being irresponsible, immoral, or weak willed. Substance abuse/dependence is a medical condition. It is chronic because it is a permanent condition that can be arrested, but not cured. When abstinence is achieved and maintained, the disease is arrested.

**Environmental, psychological, social and genetic factors cause and influence addiction.** It is important to recognize that both genetics and the environment contribute to the development of a substance abuse/dependence problems. Research in genetics has helped us understand how people who have a history of alcoholism in their family are more likely to develop the disease of addiction.

**The disease of addiction is progressive and potentially fatal.** When a person crosses the invisible line into addiction, their symptoms worsen significantly over time. The only way to stop the process is to abstain from the use of all mind-altering substances. If the person continues to use drugs and/or alcohol, or relapses after a period of abstinence, the disease gets progressively worse and can be fatal.



**Substance abuse is associated with loss of control and, as the disease progresses, an increasing preoccupation with using the mind-altering substances.** People with addiction problems cannot predict how much they will drink or use once they get started. People who are not addicted to drugs or alcohol can consistently predict their use. As the addiction progresses, physical and psychological changes lead to cravings for the drugs or alcohol, and to an increasing preoccupation with consuming them.

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**As the addiction progresses, addicts and alcoholics continue to use the substance despite experiencing adverse consequences in their lives.** The problems affect many or all areas of their lives including interpersonal relationships, work performance, and physical health.

**Thinking distortions are evident, the most notable of which is denial.** Denial refers to the addicted person's ability to deny or minimize the negative consequences their addiction has created in their lives. Feelings of shame and embarrassment lead the addict or alcoholic to block out how badly they hurt themselves and others.

### Symptoms of Drug and/or Alcohol Dependency

- Trying repeatedly to quit or cut down the use of alcohol or drugs and not being able to do so.
- An increase in the amount used (tolerance).
- "Blackouts" – memory lapses after use.
- Sneaking to use drugs or alcohol and developing an increasing dependency on alcohol and drugs.
- Making excuses for drug/alcohol use.
- Using the substance while alone or hiding all evidence of use.
- Family and friends are avoided, and they may express concerns about substance use.
- Financial, legal, medical, family, and work problems develop from substance use.
- Unable to enjoy events or social gatherings without using drugs or alcohol.
- Loss of other interests and an increased preoccupation with getting "high."
- Engaging in behaviors while "under the influence" that cause feelings of regret or shame later.
- Neglecting important responsibilities in order to use drugs or alcohol and being willing to do almost anything to get the substance.
- Unable to discuss the problem and have denial about the seriousness of the addiction problem.
- Neglect of food and proper hygiene.
- Taking risks by engaging in things that can cause them harm such as unsafe sex or driving while intoxicated or high.

### How to Deal with an Addiction Problem

The first step towards recovery is admitting that there is a problem. If you think there is a problem, there are several things you can do.

- Talk about the problem openly with people you trust.
- Avoid or limit time with people who encourage alcohol or drug use or who view addiction as a moral problem or as a problem of "weak will."

- Seek professional help.
- Seek out other recovering people. There are many 12-Step Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous that provide support and guidance to recovering alcoholics and addicts.

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## Depression and Substance Use Disorder

Depression is the most common behavioral health diagnosis in adults. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), approximately 18.8 million adults in the U.S have a depressive disorder in any given year.



It is important to understand that depression can also co-occur with other behavioral health conditions, some medical illnesses and substance use disorders. One in three depressed people also suffer from some form of substance use disorder or dependence.

In addition, it is a common tendency for depressed individuals to use alcohol or other mood altering substances as a way of coping with their symptoms. Many individuals who are addicted to alcohol or other substances also suffer from depression. This article discusses depression and co-occurring substance use disorder and what you can do to improve your mood and functioning if you have struggled with substance use along with depression.

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### The Importance of an Accurate Diagnosis

Due to the complexity of a dual diagnosis, there are many obstacles to an individual's treatment and recovery. One of the greatest obstacles, however, is receiving the diagnosis itself.

As part of the assessment of your depression your doctor or clinician probably asked you a number of questions about your medical history and use of alcohol and other substances. It is important that you clearly report your use of alcohol and other drugs including prescription medications. If you have depression you are experiencing depressed mood, lower energy levels and reduced interest in activities. The use of alcohol and other drugs can also produce the same or similar symptoms as a depressive disorder. A number of substances are known to cause depressive symptoms and emotional instability and include:

**Alcohol** — While alcohol is sometimes perceived as causing an elevated mood and feeling of well-being, it is in fact a central nervous system depressant and causes depressed mood and lower levels of energy. This effect becomes more obvious with increased drinking and prolonged use over a number of years. If alcohol abuse (periodic excessive alcohol consumption) evolves into dependence (craving alcohol, difficulty functioning without alcohol), co-occurring depressive symptoms are common — including severe symptoms of hopelessness and despair.

**Marijuana** — In addition to feelings of depression, marijuana use can cause memory impairment and problems with concentration, judgment and perception.

**Stimulants** — While stimulants (for example, cocaine,

"crack", "meth", amphetamines) give a temporary feeling of enhanced power and energy, as the initial elevation of mood fades, depression emerges.

Some people can also become dependent on medicines prescribed by physicians. Taken properly, these medications are safe and are not a cause for concern. However, sometimes people enjoy the positive feelings that accompany some medications and find it difficult to use only the prescribed dose. Listed below are some potentially addictive medications that when used improperly cause emotional distress and problems that will affect your treatment for depression:

**Sedatives** — Benzodiazepines, also known as sedatives, are highly effective medications prescribed by physicians to relieve anxiety and to promote sleep. They do have a calming effect on the symptoms of anxiety and are particularly helpful when a person is experiencing extreme anxiety. Unfortunately, harmful effects can occur when they are taken in excess of the prescribed dose or without a physician's supervision. This is also true with extended use of some medications used for anxiety or sleep such as: Ativan, Librium, Valium and Xanax.

**Pain medications** — Opioids, sometimes called narcotics are used to relieve moderate to severe pain. While effective for treating pain, they have a high potential for abuse and addiction. Some examples include: Codeine, Demerol, Morphine, Percodan and Vicodin.

### Which Condition Develops First?

Although it is clear that there may be a link between substance use disorder and depression, it is not clear that one necessarily precedes the other.

## Helpful Substance Abuse Resource

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association website provides tools and resources on substance abuse issues. Please click the link to read the story below.

[Prevention of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness](#)

Oftentimes, however, the psychiatric problem develops first or may be an underlying catalyst to substance abuse. The National Mental Health Association explains in the fact sheet "Substance Abuse-Dual Diagnosis" that some individuals with emotional symptoms of mental illness drink or use drugs to feel better, calmer, or get more energized. This type of self-medication may ultimately lead to a psychological or physical addiction to these substances. A person with an addiction, however, may develop a mental illness during the addiction.

Regardless of which condition develops first, it is essential that the depression and the substance use are both the focus of treatment.

### Treatment Issues

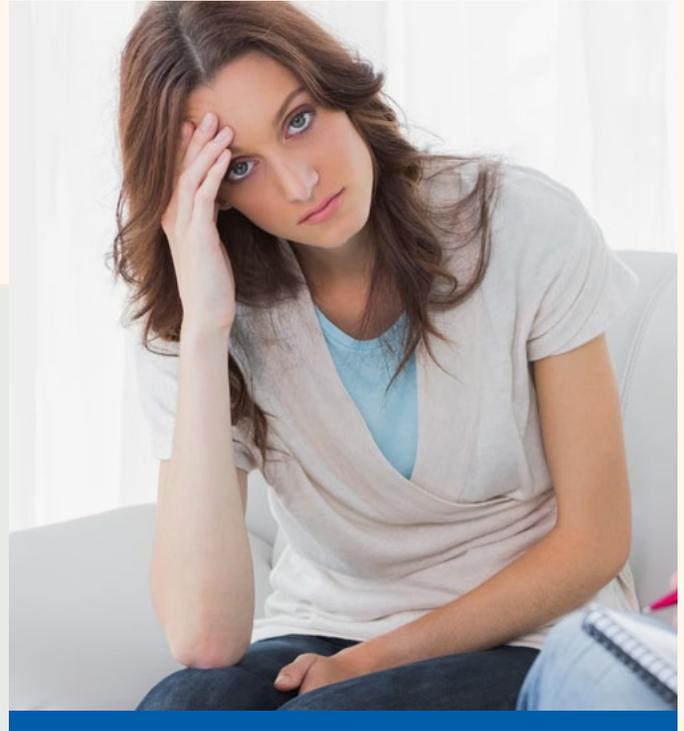
In the case of all of these substances (from alcohol to prescription medication), it is crucial to tell your doctor or clinician how much of these substances you are using. In order to benefit from your treatment you and your doctor must know whether your symptoms are due to depression, use of substances or some combination of the two. Many people drink alcohol or use other drugs to try to make themselves feel better or to "escape." However, alcohol and other drugs can cause severe and dangerous side effects if taken with antidepressant medications.

If you or your doctor believes that your use of a substance is impacting your depression, he or she may ask that you stop using alcohol or the drug during your course of treatment for depression. If you have trouble doing this it may mean that you might benefit from additional help to stop. It is particularly important for you to follow your doctor's treatment recommendations if you are prescribed an antidepressant medication. Your depression is unlikely to improve if you are using alcohol or other substances. In addition, given the way that antidepressants work it may not be safe to use alcohol or other drugs during your course of treatment.

Participation in organized self-help groups is an important component of addressing the substance use issues in treatment. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has outlined specific qualities to look for in a treatment program for dual diagnosis.

- Program has a gradual approach to treatment.
- Staff recognizes that denial is an inherent part of the problem.
- Abstinence may be a goal of the program though not a precondition for entering.
- Clients are allowed to proceed at their own pace.

- Staff conveys an understanding that it is difficult to end an addiction.
- Staff gives credit for any accomplishment.
- There are connections to available social networks to provide support.
- Clients have the opportunity to socialize and participate in recreational activities.
- Clients' families are given support and education.



### Relapse

Individuals with dual diagnosis are at a higher risk of relapse due to the complexity of their condition. Some studies show that patients with a mental health and a substance use disorder are twice as likely to drop out of outpatient mental health treatment as those who did not have substance use problems.

It is very important that these individuals find a supportive network that is sensitive to both of their conditions. Like all treatment programs, there are no quick fixes, and individuals must actively educate themselves on their medications as well as pay attention to how their body is responding.

### Some Practical Suggestions

- Be clear and straightforward with your doctor or clinician about your use of alcohol or other substances during your diagnostic assessment and treatment.
- Do not use alcohol or other drugs while you are on a course of antidepressant medication.

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- Ask your doctor or clinician questions about the addiction potential of any medications you are prescribed.
- Attend organized self-help groups.

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## Understanding Your Behavioral Health Benefits

The State of Ohio's mental and behavioral health benefits are managed by Optum Behavioral Solutions, formerly known as United Behavioral Health (UBH). This benefit is part your medical health plan.

There may be times in your life when you feel overwhelmed. Maybe you have a personal or workplace issue that consumes your thoughts. Perhaps you, your child or your spouse is struggling with stress, depression or addiction. Whatever the problem, the OEAP and Optum Behavioral Solutions are valuable resources. Your behavioral health benefit is designed to provide confidential support for personal issues such as these.

### What Can my Behavioral Health Benefit do for Me?

Your behavioral health benefit — which includes counseling and substance abuse services — can help you effectively deal with stressful and challenging situations.

People may need behavioral health services for personal issues like:

- Depression;
- Anxiety and stress;
- Alcohol abuse;
- Drug abuse;
- Domestic violence;
- And more.

### How Much Will This Benefit Cost?

Services received through your benefit plan may require pre-authorization and/or a co-payment, and there may be a deductible. There is no charge for obtaining a referral, and you may access information and develop personal plans at [liveandworkwell.com](http://liveandworkwell.com) as often as you want. For more information about your behavioral health benefits,

visit the [Benefits Administration](http://Benefits Administration) website or access the State of Ohio Employee Benefits Guide 2014-2015.

### Can I Obtain a Referral Through OEAP?

Yes, if you are covered by the State of Ohio health plan you may contact OEAP for assistance in obtaining a referral to an Optum network provider.

### Is my Behavioral Health Benefit Confidential?

Yes, neither OEAP nor Optum will ever share your personal records with anyone without your permission. All records, including medical information, referrals and evaluations, are kept strictly confidential in accordance with federal and state laws.

You can reach Optum Behavioral Solutions by phone at 800-852-1091 or via the Web at [liveandworkwell.com](http://liveandworkwell.com), Access code: 00832. Also, you can contact OEAP at 800-221-6327.

Sources: Optum Behavioral Solutions and the Ohio Employee Assistance Program



Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line, never wonder if your concern is appropriate to contact OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

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