

Substance Abuse Signs & Symptoms

In addition to the signs and symptoms listed in this fact sheet, any change in health, appearance and/or behavior may indicate substance abuse.

General signs of substance abuse

- Depression
- Wide mood swings
- Irritability or nervousness
- Change in dress
- Inappropriate responses
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Repeatedly late/absent from work
- Bragging about partying
- Arrogance or grandiosity
- Easily angered or hurt
- DUI arrests
- Projecting false confidence
- Wearing sunglasses at inappropriate times
- Asking others to cover or lie for

Signs of Misuse

Alcohol

- Red eyes/nose
- Slurred speech
- Impaired judgment
- Inability to process information
- Headaches
- Inability to communicate
- Memory impairment
- Alcohol odor on breath or body
- Decreased attention span
- Inappropriate display of emotions

*Withdrawal: Tremors, sweating, excitability, loss of sleep, seizures **Withdrawal is potentially dangerous- can be fatal***

Marijuana

- Poor memory
- Bloodshot eyes
- Poor judgment
- Paranoid thinking
- Decreased coordination
- Difficulty concentrating
- Erratic behavior/emotions
- Lack of motivation

Withdrawal: Insomnia, irritability, depression

Cocaine

- Dilated pupils
- Excitability/anxiety/restlessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Repeated sniffing or nose wiping
- Reduced sense of humor
- Nasal congestion
- Compulsive behavior (teeth grinding, hand washing, etc.)
- Forgetfulness
- Weight loss
- Rapid speech
- Euphoria

Withdrawal: Exhaustion, depression, paranoia

Amphetamines/Methamphetamine

- Dilated pupils
- Weight loss
- Distorted thinking/paranoia
- Perspiration
- Over reactions
- Cough if smoking
- Other signs similar to cocaine
- Irritability, anxiety, apprehension
- Difficulty focusing eyes
- Alertness/euphoria
- Headaches/dizziness
- Exaggerated reflexes
- Needle marks if injecting

Withdrawal: Possible violence, “tweaking”- extreme agitation, paranoia & rages, sleeping for many days at one time

Opioids (Heroin, morphine, painkillers)

- Increased pain tolerance
- Constricted, “pin-point” pupils
- Nausea
- Mental clouding
- Impaired coordination
- Reduced vision
- Needle marks if injecting
- Decreased physical activity
- “Nodding”- falling asleep while standing or sitting
- Slowed heart rate/breathing
- Depressed appetite/thirst
- Euphoria followed by drowsiness
- Wide mood swings

Withdrawal: Cold sweats, goose bumps, nausea & vomiting, muscle and bone pain, agitation/sleeplessness ****Withdrawal is potentially dangerous****

Hallucinogens (PCP, LSD, ketamine)

- Permanently damaged mental perception
- Rapid heart & breathing rate
- High blood pressure
- Tremors
- Dilated pupils
- Increased pain tolerance
- Drowsiness
- Repetitive speech patterns
- Blank stare
- Incomplete verbal responses
- Numbness
- Drooling
- Nausea or vomiting
- Suicidal thoughts
- Flashbacks (visual hallucinations)
- Confusion/disorientation/memory loss
- Extreme agitation
- Muscle rigidity
- Thick, slurred speech
- Involuntary eye movement

Withdrawal: Anxiety, depression, no physical withdrawal symptoms

Benzodiazepines (Valium, Ativan, Zanax)

- Slurred speech
- Dilated pupils
- Dry mouth
- Lack of coordination/motor function
- Increased appetite
- Sleepiness/extreme sedation

Withdrawal: Anxiety/panic attacks, insomnia, restlessness/irritability, nightmares, joint pain, headaches, flu-like symptoms, extreme thirst, itchy skin, tremors, seizures, difficulty swallowing, hyper-sensitivity to light & noise, blurred vision, fatigue, fluctuations in body temperatures, dizziness, weakness ****Withdrawal is potentially dangerous- can be fatal****

For further questions about substance abuse prevention, intervention, treatment or recovery services contact Compass Mark at (717) 299-2831 or info@compassmark.org.

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