



DIAGNOSIS OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

is based on identifying a pathologic pattern of behaviours in which patients **continue to use a substance despite** experiencing significant problems related to its use. There are 11 criteria divided into four categories.

IMPAIRED CONTROL OVER USE

- The person takes the substance in **larger amounts or for a longer time** than originally planned
- The person **desires to stop or cut down** use of the substance
- The person **spends substantial time obtaining, using, or recovering** from the effects of the substance
- The person has an **intense craving** to use the substance

SOCIAL IMPAIRMENT

- The person **fails to fulfil major role obligations** at work, school, or home
- The person **continues** to use the substance **even though it causes** (or worsens) social or **interpersonal problems**
- The person **gives up or reduces** important social, occupational, or recreational **activity because of substance use**

RISKY USE

- The person **uses** the substance in **physically hazardous situations** (eg, when driving or in dangerous social circumstances)
- The person **continues** to use the substance **despite knowing it is worsening a medical or psychologic problem**

PHARMACOLOGIC SYMPTOMS*

- **Tolerance:** The person needs to progressively increase the drug dose to produce intoxication or the desired effect, or the effect of a given dose decreases over time
- **Withdrawal:** Untoward physical effects occur when the drug is stopped or when it is counteracted by a specific antagonist

*Note that some drugs, particularly opioids, sedative/hypnotics, and stimulants, can result in tolerance and/or withdrawal symptoms even when taken as prescribed for legitimate medical reasons and for relatively brief periods (< 1 week for opioids).

People who have **≥ 2 of these criteria within a 12-month period** are considered to have a substance use disorder.

The severity of the substance use disorder is determined by the number of symptoms:

- Mild: 2 to 3 criteria
- Moderate: 4 to 5 criteria
- Severe: ≥ 6 criteria



TREATMENT VARIES DEPENDING ON SUBSTANCE AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Treating substance use disorder includes one or more of the following:

- acute detoxification,
- prevention and management of withdrawal,
- reduction of use,
- maintenance of abstinence.

With increasing evidence and greater understanding of the biologic processes underlying compulsive drug taking, substance use disorders have become much more firmly established as medical illnesses.

As such, these illnesses are amenable to various forms of treatment, including:

- support groups (Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve Step programs);
- psychotherapy (eg, motivational enhancement therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, relapse prevention); and
- medications, ranging from agonist therapy (eg, nicotine replacement therapy for tobacco use disorder, methadone and buprenorphine for opioid use disorder).

A focus on referral for specialty treatment will help reduce individual consequences as well as societal impact.