

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

What is Substance Use Disorder?

Substance use disorder (SUD) is a treatable medical condition that affects the brain and behavior, leading to difficulty controlling substance use despite harmful consequences. Recovery is possible, and millions of people achieve and maintain it.

Signs of Substance Use Disorder

- Using more or for longer than intended
- Unsuccessful attempts to cut down or quit
- Spending significant time obtaining, using, or recovering from substances
- Cravings or strong urges to use
- Continued use despite problems in relationships, work, or health
- Giving up important activities because of use
- Using in dangerous situations
- Developing tolerance (needing more for same effect)
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms

Recovery Strategies

Build Your Support Network:

- Attend support groups (AA, NA, SMART Recovery, Celebrate Recovery)
- Connect with a sponsor or recovery coach
- Involve supportive family and friends
- Participate in peer support programs

Identify and Avoid Triggers:

- People, places, or things associated with substance use
- Stressful situations or negative emotions
- Social pressure or certain environments
- Create a plan for handling high-risk situations

Develop Healthy Coping Skills:

- Practice stress management (deep breathing, meditation, mindfulness)
- Exercise regularly to improve mood and reduce cravings
- Engage in hobbies and activities you enjoy
- Use distraction techniques when cravings hit

Create Structure and Routine:

- Maintain regular sleep/wake times
- Plan daily activities and set achievable goals
- Fill your time with meaningful activities
- Establish healthy eating habits

FOR MORE INFO: sage-elevate.com or email intake@sage-elevate.com



Manage Cravings:

- Remember: cravings are temporary and will pass
- Use the “HALT” check: Am I Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired?
- Call someone from your support network
- Engage in physical activity or a distracting activity
- Practice urge surfing—ride out the craving without acting on it

Make Environmental Changes:

- Remove substances and paraphernalia from your home
- Change phone numbers or contacts that trigger use
- Find new, sober activities and social circles
- Avoid bars, clubs, or other high-risk locations

Treatment Options

Behavioral Therapies: Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing, contingency management, family therapy

Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT): FDA-approved medications (methadone, buprenorphine, naltrexone) combined with counseling for opioid or alcohol use disorder

Support Groups: 12-step programs (AA, NA), SMART Recovery, Refuge Recovery, and other peer-led groups

Residential/Inpatient Treatment: Intensive structured programs for focused recovery

Outpatient Programs: Flexible treatment while living at home (IOP, PHP)

Detoxification: Medically supervised withdrawal management when needed

Working with Your Treatment Team

- Be honest about your substance use and struggles
- Attend all scheduled appointments
- Follow medication protocols if prescribed
- Communicate about cravings or relapse risk
- Participate actively in therapy and groups
- Develop a relapse prevention plan together

Warning Signs of Relapse

Contact your provider if you notice increased cravings or thinking about using, reconnecting with people who use substances, isolating from support network, skipping meetings or appointments, romanticizing past use (“it wasn’t that bad”), increased stress without healthy coping, stopping medications or treatment.

Resources

Crisis/Support: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline • **SAMHSA Helpline:** 1-800-662-4357 (free, confidential, 24/7) • **Overdose:** Call 911 immediately • **AA:** aa.org • **NA:** na.org • **SMART Recovery:** smartrecovery.org

This tip sheet is for educational purposes. Always consult your healthcare provider about your specific treatment plan.