

October 5th, 2020

Weekly Wellness & Counseling Newsletter

Understanding Substance Abuse

October is considered Substance Abuse Prevention & Awareness Month and is dedicated to help understand, remove stigma, and educate individuals regarding substance abuse. Substance Abuse is the excess use of substances (drugs or alcohol), or using a drug outside of what it was prescribed for, such as using Adderall or Xanax without a prescription.

Substance abuse can affect anyone no matter race, ethnicity, age, or gender and can lead to Substance Use Disorder . College Campuses have the stereotype of being environments where substance use and substance abuse are common. With the added stress and anxiety of the pandemic, overall substance use and abuse have been increasing. Understanding the signs of substance abuse or Substance Use Disorder and addressing it early on can help reduce negative consequences on your physical, mental, and emotional health.

Some Common Myths Regarding Substance Abuse



Myth: Substance Abuse is a choice/Substance Use Disorder is voluntary

Reality: Although it may be a choice the first time you drink or use a substance, there is psychological research that indicates alcohol and other substances can change the way the brain works, which can result in Substance Use Disorder. It may be easy to pick something up, but breaking patterns and habits can be difficult and often take a lot of work.

Myth: College students can't develop Substance Use Disorder

Reality: Any individual can abuse a substance no matter the age, race, or gender, increasing one's risk of Substance Use Disorder. Because of the stereotypes of college students and their alcohol or drug use behaviors, it is difficult to notice when someone's behavior is leading towards a more serious problem. College students are more likely to experiment with substances and use substances such as alcohol in excess, and some research indicates that college students may even be at a higher risk for substance abuse and Substance Use Disorder.

Myth: You have to hit rock bottom to have a problem

Reality: Oftentimes we think of Substance Use Disorder or substance abuse as obvious: the person who can't keep a job, drinks all day, has poor relationships, etc. While Substance Use Disorder and substance abuse may look like that, it is important to also understand that it can be subtle as well, especially in the beginning. In the DSM-V, there are different levels of Substance Use Disorder: mild, moderate, or severe, meaning that Substance Use Disorder and substance abuse may present in various ways and may not appear as obvious to notice. There is not always a stereotypical "Rock Bottom" that needs to occur in order for someone to have a problem. Additionally, it is never too early to seek help if you start recognizing early signs of substance abuse.

Substance Use Vs. Substance Abuse

Understanding the Difference

Substance Use can refer to casual use of substance such as alcohol, while Substance Abuse refers to excess use of a substance, tolerance to that substance, and/or experiencing withdrawal. Abusing substances can lead to Substance Use Disorder and negative health consequences. It is important to understand that anyone can be affected by substance abuse and that while college is a time to explore your freedom, no one is immune or invincible. Some factors that increase one's risk for substance abuse and Substance Use Disorder include:

- Genetic predisposition/Family history of addiction
- History of mental illness
- Trauma
- Peer pressure
- Lack of social support

Warning signs of Substance Abuse

Craving - feeling a constant need/want for alcohol or a certain drug

Excess Use - Consuming in excess or without control, for instance Binge Drinking

Inability to cut down - having difficulties with trying to cut down or limit consumption

Compulsivity - continuing to engage in substance use despite negative consequences, such as problems in relationships and regretful behaviors,

Changes in behaviors - missing classes, not participating in extra-curriculars due to substance abuse. Friends/Family noticing differences or making complaints about behavior

Emotional drinking - understanding the difference between socially drinking and emotionally drinking, and how drinking for emotional reasons may result in more reliance on a substance.

Reducing Your Risk



Moderate consumption

Limiting the amount of alcohol, avoiding blacking out, and drinking slowly can help reduce risk



Cope with stress

Understanding your stress and your triggers can help you create healthy coping skills instead of relying on substances



Social Support

Find and surround yourself with people who don't pressure you or push you into uncomfortable situations



Understanding your risk factors

Understand and be aware of your own risk factors, such as family history of substance abuse. Having a good social support, limiting consumption frequency, and having healthy coping skills can help prevent substance abuse

Resources

If you feel that you or someone you know may be affected by Substance Abuse, there are ways to receive help, both at Ursinus and outside of campus



Counseling Services are available at the Wellness Center

For more information or to book an appointment:

<https://www.ursinus.edu/offices/wellness-center/counseling/>



Office of Prevention & Advocacy offers educational seminars on substance use, brief assessments on alcohol/drug use, healthy/well-being coaching, and recovery support

Free online self-assessments for alcohol and marijuana use

Contact: Katie Bean
610-409-3590 | kbean@ursinus.edu



SAMHSA has a Free National, Confidential Helpline for individuals who may want more information or referrals

1-800-662-4357