

# UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

*"How Can I Overcome My Addiction?"*

THE **HOPE** LINE

A black and white photograph of a person standing in shallow water, facing away from the camera and looking out at the ocean. The sky is overcast with soft, diffused light. The person is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and dark pants. The water is calm with gentle ripples.

TheHopeLine.com



# SUBSTANCE ABUSE

**Substance abuse and addiction are complex problems. As with many addictions, there are often underlying reasons tied to why someone uses and abuses drugs. Addicts sometimes use drugs to mask pain or emotional issues as a result of traumatic life events. Others may start recreational drug use for fun and find themselves addicted. Whatever the reason for using drugs, addiction brings a lot of pain and problems with it. However, there is hope and help in overcoming substance abuse and addiction.**





# WHAT IS SUBSTANCE ABUSE?

**Substance abuse is the harmful use of “psychoactive” substances, including alcohol and drugs. These substances lead to dependence that damages both the body and mind, creating an addiction. The chemicals contained in drugs and related substances alter the way the brain’s communication system works, disrupting the way nerve cells send, receive and process information. Drug use essentially “rewires” the brain, making substance addiction difficult to break. That’s why quitting and recovering takes more than just sheer willpower or self-control.**

# SYMPTOMS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

***The symptoms of substance abuse and addiction are extensive and can vary from person to person. The most common signs of substance abuse include unusual behavior, changes in habits and patterns, including:***

- Neglecting responsibilities
- Distancing from family members, friends and loved ones
- Drop in attendance or performance at work or school
- Unexplained need for money or financial problems
- Sudden change in friends, hangouts and hobbies
- Getting into trouble, such as fights, accidents and illegal activities
- Unexplained change in personality or attitude
- Sudden mood swings, irritability or angry outbursts
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity, agitation or giddiness
- Lack of motivation; being lethargic or “spaced out”
- Appears fearful, anxious or paranoid

***In addition to behavioral changes, these physical signs of substance abuse are often present:***

Bloodshot eyes, with pupils larger or smaller than normal

Changes in appetite

Changes in sleep patterns

Sudden weight loss or weight gain

Unusual smells on breath, body or clothing

Tremors, slurred speech or impaired coordination



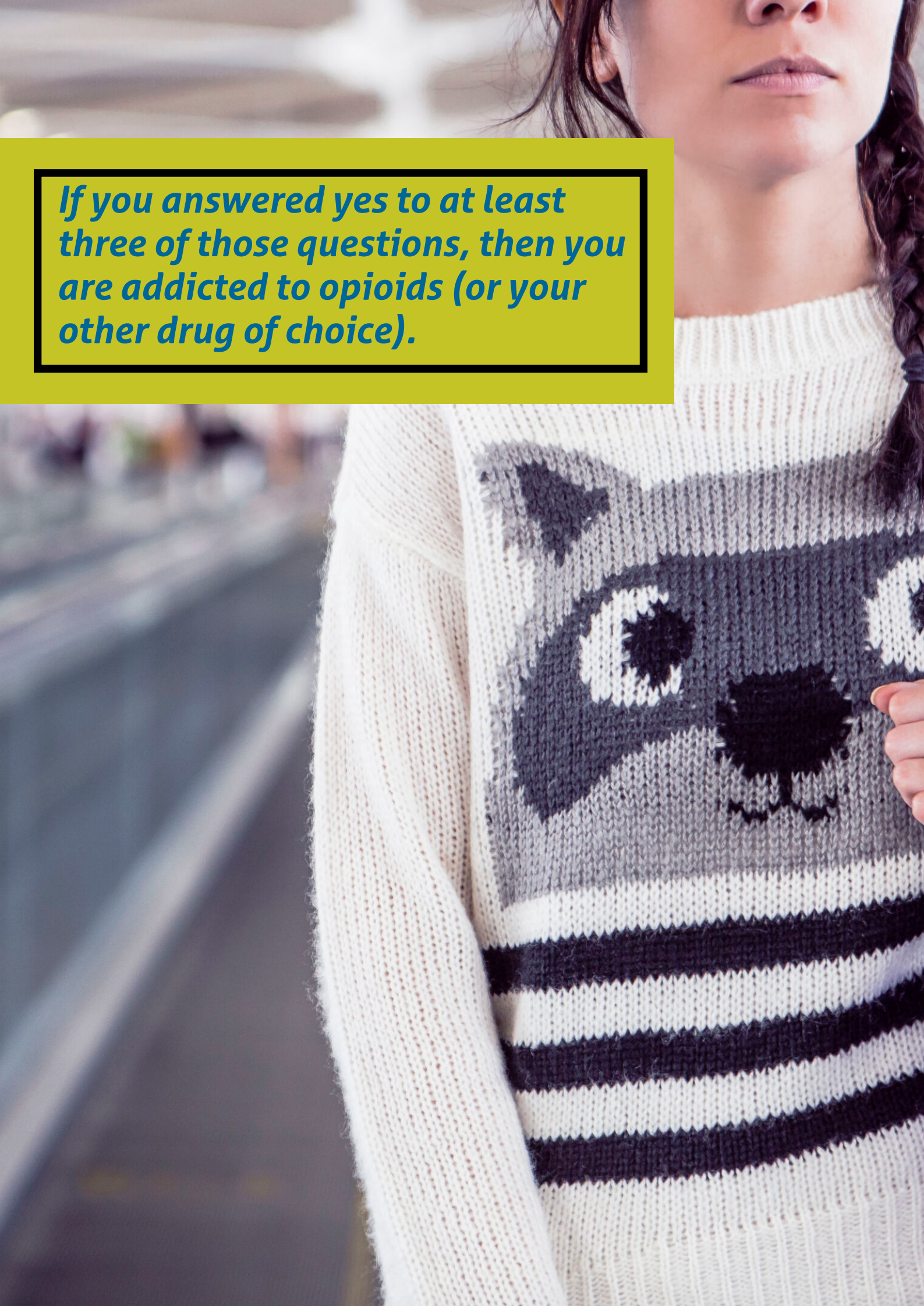
# WARNING SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE & DRUGS

***There are a variety of common substances and drugs that result in addictions. Each substance or drug has a specific combination of effects on the user. Though addictions can sometimes be hard to spot, knowing the various behavioral and physical signs can help:***

- **Marijuana:** Glassy, red eyes; loud talking, inappropriate laughter followed by sleepiness; loss of interest, motivation; weight gain or loss.
- **Depressants (including Xanax, Valium, GHB):** Contracted pupils; drunk-like; difficulty concentrating; clumsiness; poor judgement; slurred speech; sleepiness.
- **Stimulants (including amphetamines, cocaine crystal meth):** Dilated pupils; hyperactivity; euphoria; irritability; anxiety; excessive talking followed by depression or excessive sleeping at odd times; may go long periods of time without eating or sleeping; weight loss; dry mouth and nose.
- **Opioids/Prescription Drugs (Oxycontin, Codeine, Methadone, Fentanyl) -** Noticeable elation/euphoria; Marked sedation/drowsiness; Confusion; Constricted pupils; Slowed breathing; Intermittent nodding off, or loss of consciousness.
- **Inhalants (glues, aerosols, vapors):** Watery eyes; impaired vision, memory and thought; secretions from the nose or rashes around the nose and mouth; headaches and nausea; appearance of intoxication; drowsiness; poor muscle control; changes in appetite; anxiety; irritability; lots of cans/aerosols in the trash.
- **Hallucinogens (LSD PCP):** Dilated pupils; bizarre and irrational behavior including paranoia; aggression, hallucinations; mood swings; detachment from people; absorption with self or other objects; slurred speech; confusion.
- **Heroin:** Contracted pupils; no response of pupils to light; needle marks; sleeping at unusual times; sweating; vomiting; coughing, sniffing; twitching; loss of appetite.

***If you have been taking an opioid and you are wondering if you may be addicted here are some questions to ask yourself (this can also apply to other types of drugs):***

- 1. Has your use of opioids (or other type of drugs) increased over time?***
- 2. Do you experience withdrawal symptoms when you stop using?***
- 3. Do you use more than you would like, or more than is prescribed?***
- 4. Have you experienced negative consequences to your using?***
- 5. Have you put off doing things because of your drug use?***
- 6. Do you find yourself thinking obsessively about getting or using your drug?***
- 7. Have you made unsuccessful attempts at cutting down your drug use?***

A woman with dark hair in a braid is wearing a white knit sweater. The sweater features a large, stylized cat face design in grey and black on the chest, and horizontal black and white stripes on the lower half. The background is a blurred outdoor street scene.

*If you answered yes to at least three of those questions, then you are addicted to opioids (or your other drug of choice).*

# GETTING HELP FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE

*If you are dealing with substance abuse, you aren't alone. Understanding your addiction and taking the first step towards help can seem overwhelming. With support and help from friends, family and healthcare professionals, you can regain your life back. Here are some things you can do to start your recovery:*



## **Don't try to overcome your addiction alone.**

Recovery is much easier when you have the support, encouragement and guidance from family, friends, ministers and health professionals such as therapists, counselors and doctors.

**Be open and honest.** Drug use is often directly tied to a traumatic experience in the past or other issues. True recovery is not just about quitting substance abuse--it's also about dealing with underlying problems. Find a counselor or therapist you trust to help sift through the emotions and thoughts you may have.

**Tackling an addiction isn't just about willpower.** While perseverance is important to overcoming addiction, it isn't just about being strong mentally. Drugs and substance abuse "rewires" the brain and nerve cells, along with other impacts on your physical body. Healthcare professionals should play a role in your recovery and help you come up with a plan that works for you and your body, such as therapies, medications and more.

**Keep going.** Those who deal with substance abuse sometimes relapse. If you relapse, let your support system of doctors, counselors and family know immediately. They care about you and are there to help you get back on track.

**Stay connected.** Family, friends and loved ones should play a part in your recovery. Be sure to set aside time to stay connected, talk or do fun activities together.



IF YOU ARE DEALING WITH  
DRUG OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE,  
THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WANT  
TO HELP GET YOU STARTED ON  
YOUR RECOVERY JOURNEY.  
TALK WITH A HOPECOACH VIA  
CHAT AT **[THEHOPELINE.COM](https://www.thehopline.com)**.

# HELPING SOMEONE DEAL WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE

*Whether you are just noticing symptoms or have known for a while, trying to help someone with substance abuse can be overwhelming. Here are a few ways you can encourage him or her on the recovery journey.*



**Speak Up and Listen.** Talk with your friend or loved one about their substance abuse problem and let them know your concern. He or she may not be ready to talk about it so be prepared for excuses or denial. If the person is ready to talk, listen without judgement and offer to help.

**Stay positive and encouraging.** Your friend or loved one may or may not be ready to move forward from substance abuse. Either way, you can stay positive and be a source of encouragement, no matter where they are on their journey.

**Be there.** A big part of a successful recovery is a strong support system, made up of encouraging family members, friends, recovery groups, ministers and more. You can make a difference just by being a shoulder to cry on, asking how the recovery is going, planning fun activities and being a good friend.

**Send this eBook.** To help someone begin their recovery journey, there needs to be a starting point. This eBook can be that starting point, offering explanations and signs of substance abuse with contact information to get real help now. TheHopeLine can connect him or her with counselors, health care professionals and resources.

**NEED TO TALK?**

**We're here for you. Talk with a HopeCoach via chat at [TheHopeLine.com](https://TheHopeLine.com).**



# A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE ON SUBSTANCE



Substance abuse can seem like an overwhelming, seemingly hopeless thing to overcome. You may feel like no one understands or there isn't a way out but there is hope and help. Here at TheHopeLine, we truly care about you and want to help you deal with substance abuse. Whether you need encouragement, resources, someone to talk to or help figuring out what to do next, we are here for you.

No matter what problems or issues you're dealing with, know that God loves you no matter what and you are valued and worthy in His eyes. God has a plan for your life beyond what you can even imagine. The Bible says that Jesus came to earth and died so that you might have a fuller and richer life than you might ever dream. In fact, Jesus said, "A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. ***"I have come so that they (you, and everyone) may have life and have it in abundance."*** [John 10:10 HCSB]. God has a unique plan for your life and he knows you by name! You are loved and accepted, regardless of what has happened in your past or what you may be struggling with in the present. ***God wants to have a real, personal relationship with you and to help you discover your true self-worth and identity in Him.***

If you want to know more about having a relationship with God or have questions about substance abuse, chat online with a HopeCoach at **TheHopeLine.com**.

**Verses of Hope for Substance Abuse**

# Check out our other Guides:

Understanding Depression

Understanding Suicide

Understanding Self-Worth

Understanding Lying

Understanding Dating

Understanding Anxiety

and more at:

<http://www.thehopeline.com/guides/>

# Sources

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2. "DrugFacts: Understanding Drug Abuse and Addiction." *DrugFacts: Understanding Drug Abuse and Addiction*. National Institute on Drug Abuse, 01 Nov. 2012. Web. 04 June 2015.
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