



DUAL DIAGNOSIS

WHAT IS DUAL DIAGNOSIS?

A person who has both an alcohol or drug problem and a psychiatric problem is said to have a dual diagnosis. In order to recover fully, the person needs treatment for both problems.

WHO DEVELOPS A DUAL DIAGNOSIS?

Individuals with psychiatric disorders have an increased risk for alcohol and drug abuse. Likewise, individuals with alcohol and drug problems have an increased risk for psychiatric disorders.

HOW COMMON ARE DUAL DIAGNOSES?

About one-third of those with a psychiatric disorder also develop a drug or alcohol abuse problem at some point in their lives. About half of those with a drug or alcohol abuse problem show signs of psychiatric disorders.

WHAT SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEMS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL ILLNESS?

Alcohol abuse is often associated with depression. Thirty-two percent of those with depressive disorders also abuse alcohol and/or other drugs. More specifically, 27 percent of those with major depression and 56 percent of those with manic depression suffer from dual diagnoses. Individuals with depression may try to mask their despair, enhance their low self-esteem, or diminish their feelings of guilt with drugs or alcohol.

Among patients with schizophrenia, 47 percent have an alcohol and drug abuse problem, a rate that is close to five times higher than the general population.

WHAT TYPES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS DO SUBSTANCE ABUSERS HAVE?

Studies indicate that alcohol and drug abusers often display signs of anxiety disorders such as panic attacks, phobias, obsessions and compulsions. In some individuals, drug use or withdrawal may provoke nervousness, panic, hyperactivity, and agitation. Other times, these symptoms are associated with a diagnosable coexisting anxiety disorder.

HOW IS A DUAL DIAGNOSIS TREATED?

Each situation is addressed differently. Depending on an individual's health, detoxification may be required before any treatment is started. Once the cycle of abuse is interrupted, it's time for dual treatment: rehabilitation for the alcohol or drug problem and treatment for the psychiatric problem.

Rehabilitation for a substance abuse problem usually involves individual or group psychotherapy, education about alcohol and drugs, and participation in a 12 step recovery program. The idea is to learn to enjoy life without the "crutches" or drugs or alcohol.

Treatment for a psychiatric problem depends upon the diagnosis. For most disorders, individual and group therapy as well as medications are recommended. A support group of other people who are recovering from the same condition may also prove highly beneficial. The goals of mental health treatment are often to improve people's ability to understand and communicate their feelings and to develop better problem solving or decision making skills.

IF YOU THINK YOU KNOW SOMEONE WITH A DUAL DIAGNOSIS...

Don't try to make the diagnoses on your own. Instead, encourage the person to acknowledge the problem and seek help. Suggest a professional evaluation with a licensed mental health professional.

If your loved one is reluctant, try doing the legwork yourself—make the appointment, drive the person there and back, and offer your encouragement and support. Either on your own, or in conjunction with your loved one, contact us for help. We provide private assessments for individuals and families. During this appointment, you can learn more about the signs, symptoms and treatments for dual diagnosis. Take the next step and reach out for help. Relief and recovery are the rewards.

CALL 1-800-556-6249.



DARTMOUTH-HITCHCOCK BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

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