

Signs and Symptoms of Common Co-Occurring Disorders

The mental health problems that most commonly co-occur with substance abuse are depression, anxiety disorders, and bipolar disorder.

Common signs and symptoms of depression

- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Inability to experience pleasure
- Appetite or weight changes
- Sleep changes
- Loss of energy
- Strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Concentration problems
- Anger, physical pain, and reckless behavior (especially in men)

Common signs and symptoms of mania in bipolar disorder

- Feelings of euphoria *or* extreme irritability
- Unrealistic, grandiose beliefs
- Decreased need for sleep
- Increased energy
- Rapid speech and racing thoughts
- Impaired judgment and impulsivity
- Hyperactivity
- Anger or rage

Common signs and symptoms of anxiety

- Excessive tension and worry
- Feeling restless or jumpy
- Irritability or feeling “on edge”
- Racing heart or shortness of breath
- Nausea, trembling, or dizziness
- Muscle tension, headaches
- Trouble concentrating
- Insomnia

Treatment for co-occurring substance abuse and mental health problems

The best treatment for co-occurring disorders is an integrated approach, where both the substance abuse problem and the mental disorder are treated simultaneously.

Recovery depends on treating both the addiction and the mental health problem

Whether your mental health or substance abuse problem came first, recovery depends on treating *both*

disorders.

- **There is hope.** Recovering from co-occurring disorders takes time, commitment, and courage. It may take months or even years but people with substance abuse and mental health problems *can* and *do* get better.
- **Combined treatment is best.** Your best chance of recovery is through integrated treatment for both the substance abuse problem and the mental health problem. This means getting combined mental health and addiction treatment from the same treatment provider or team.
- **Relapses are part of the recovery process.** Don't get too discouraged if you relapse. Slips and setbacks happen, but, with hard work, most people can recover from their relapses and move on with recovery.
- **Peer support can help.** You may benefit from joining a self-help support group like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. They give you a chance to lean on others who know what you're going through and learn from their experiences.

How to find the right program for co-occurring disorders

As with a substance abuse program, make sure that the program is appropriately licensed and accredited, the treatment methods are backed by research, and there is an aftercare program to prevent relapse. Additionally, you should make sure that the program has experience with your particular mental health issue. Some programs, for example, may have experience treating depression or anxiety, but not schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

There are a variety of approaches that treatment programs may take, but there are some basics of effective treatment that you should look for:

- Treatment addresses both the substance abuse problem and your mental health problem.
- You share in the decision-making process and are actively involved in setting goals and developing strategies for change.
- Treatment includes basic education about your disorder and related problems.
- You are taught healthy coping skills and strategies to minimize substance abuse, cope with upset, and strengthen your relationships.

Treatment for dual diagnosis or co-occurring disorders

- **Helping you think about the role that alcohol and other drugs play in your life.** This should be done confidentially, without any negative consequences. People feel free to discuss these issues when the discussion is confidential, nonjudgmental, and not tied to legal consequences.
- **Offering you a chance to learn more about alcohol and drugs,** to learn about how they interact with mental illnesses and with medications, and to discuss your own use of alcohol and drugs.
- **Helping you become involved with supported employment and other services** that may help your process of recovery.
- **Helping you identify and develop your own recovery goals.** If you decide that your use of alcohol or drugs may be a problem, a counselor trained in integrated dual diagnosis treatment can help you identify and develop your own recovery goals. This process includes learning about steps toward recovery from both illnesses.
- **Providing special counseling specifically designed for people with dual diagnosis.** This can be done individually, with a group of peers, with your family, or with a combination of these.