



Alcohol and Substance Use in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

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Overview

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can happen after a traumatic event. This is a very upsetting event that you see or that happens to you or a loved one. A sexual assault, a car crash, a natural disaster, and war are examples of this type of event.

PTSD affects people in different ways. It can get in the way of school or work. It can also make you withdraw from friends or loved ones. Some people use alcohol or drugs to help relieve their symptoms. This can lead to problems.

If you have PTSD and use alcohol or drugs, you're more likely to get a substance use disorder. Like PTSD, a substance use disorder is a mental health condition. It affects your brain and behavior. When you have this condition, it's very hard to control your use of substances. Substances include alcohol, illegal drugs, and prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

Symptoms of substance use disorder

The more symptoms of substance use disorder you have, the more severe it may be. Symptoms include:

- Using more of the substance or using it for a longer time than you ever meant to.
- Not being able to cut down or control your use.
- Spending a lot of time getting or using the substance or recovering from the effects.
- Having a strong need, or craving, for the substance.
- Not being able to do your main jobs at work, school, or home.
- Continuing to use, even though the substance use hurts your relationships.
- Not doing important activities because of your substance use.
- Using substances in situations where doing so is dangerous, such as driving.
- Using the substance even though it's causing health problems.
- Needing more of the substance to get the same effect, or getting less effect from the same amount over time (tolerance).
- Having uncomfortable symptoms when you stop using the substance or use less (withdrawal).

Caring for yourself

If you have been diagnosed with PTSD and are concerned about your use of alcohol, illegal drugs, or other substances, there are some things you can do.

- Learn about PTSD.
This can help you better understand how and why it affects you. You may also learn about healthy ways to manage PTSD.
- Learn about substance use disorder.
You could learn about the symptoms. And it may be helpful to understand how PTSD and substance use disorder are connected.
- Talk to your doctor about your concerns.
You could ask your doctor about treatments that help with both PTSD and substance use disorder.
- If you don't have a counselor, consider finding one.
A counselor can help you process your experiences and learn skills to cope. Look for a counselor who has experience helping people with PTSD and substance use disorder.
- Seek support.
Ask for help from people who understand what you're going through and who care about you. This could be a support group for people with PTSD and substance use disorder. It could also be close family members or friends that you trust.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed.
Call your doctor if you're having a problem with any medicines.

Where to get help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

If you or someone you know talks about suicide, self-harm, a mental health crisis, a substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress, get help right away. You can:

- Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**.
- Call **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.
- Text **HOME to 741741** to access the Crisis Text Line.

Related Information

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Credits

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