

Substance Use Spectrum

Substance use occurs on a **spectrum**, with varying degrees and patterns ranging from no use to addiction. Substances have different effects on individuals depending on a variety of factors including sex, age, weight, tolerance, and underlying health conditions. Recognizing an individual's position on the substance use spectrum is crucial for offering tailored care that promotes well-being and minimizes risks or harm.

Non-Use (Abstinence)

Beneficial Use

Lower-Risk Use

Higher-Risk Use

Addiction (Substance Use Disorder)

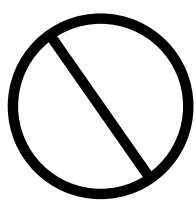
**Substance use can be seen on a spectrum.
Individuals may move back and forth along the spectrum in their lifetime.**

Non-Use involves avoiding the use of substances.

This choice can be influenced by various factors such as health concerns, personal beliefs, religious reasons, convictions, or a desire to avoid potential negative consequences associated with substance use.

Examples:

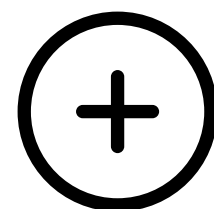
- Abstaining from substance use because there is a history of addiction in one's family.
- Abstaining because one does not like the effects of substances.



Beneficial Use is the use of substances that has a positive effect on health, social, or spiritual well-being.

Examples

- Using prescribed medications like pain relievers, insulin, or antidepressants.
- Using tobacco for ceremonial/religious purposes (e.g., smudging).
- Drinking a cup of coffee to stay alert



Lower-Risk Use involves using substances in a manner that minimizes the risk of negative health and social consequences.

Lower-risk use has minimal impact on a person, their family, friends, and others.

Examples:

- Adhering to guidelines, such as the alcohol, cannabis, and nicotine lower-risk guidelines.
- Practicing safer practices, and making informed choices.



Higher-Risk Use involves using substances frequently, heavily, or in risky situations, may have a harmful or negative impact to a person, their family, friends, and others.

Examples:

- Frequent use.
- Consuming large quantities and high potency.
- Engaging in unsafe activities (e.g., driving under the influence).
- Consuming multiple substances at once.



Addiction is also called substance use disorder. It is a treatable medical condition that involves continuous use despite negative impacts to a person, their family, friends, and others. Addiction can result from a combination of genetic, environmental, social and psychological factors, and can impact a person's health, relationships, and daily life.

Examples:

- Alcohol Use Disorder, Cannabis Use Disorder, Opioids Use Disorder, Nicotine Use Disorder.



Staying informed on substances and harm reduction tips is important.

Learn more here:

[decycde.ca/facts-sheets](https://www.decycde.ca/facts-sheets)

Youth and young adults are especially vulnerable to the effects of substances.

To learn more about harm reduction and stigma, visit:

[decycde.ca/teacher-resources](https://www.decycde.ca/teacher-resources)

References:

1. Health Canada (2022). Substance Use Spectrum. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/substance-use-spectrum-infographic.html>
2. Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d). Substance use and addiction. <https://ontario.cmha.ca/addiction-and-substance-use-and-addiction/>
3. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2012). What is Addiction? <http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/health-information/a-z-mental-health-and-addiction-information/drug-use-addiction/Pages/addiction.aspx>
4. <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index>