

# Substance Use Disorder

Substance use disorder (SUD) can affect anyone. SUD is a type of addiction.

## The FOUR Cs of SUD

1. **C**raving
2. Loss of **C**ontrol of amount or frequency of use
3. **C**ompulsion to use
4. Use despite **C**onsequences

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Blackouts
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Anxiety, irritability, or depression
- Injuries while using
- Relationship issues
- Spending money on substances instead of other essentials
- Legal problems related to substance use
- Feelings of desperation and isolation



## Substance Use Spectrum

Learn more about the Substance Use Spectrum:  
[decyde.ca/educational-materials/#substance-use](https://decyde.ca/educational-materials/#substance-use)



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

SUD can result from a combination of genetic, environmental, social and psychological factors and can impact a person's health, relationships, and daily life.



If a person has been heavily using substances for a continuous period, they may experience changes in the body and brain including increased tolerance. This may cause withdrawal and relapse.

**Tolerance:** the need to take increasingly higher doses of a substance over time to obtain the same effect.

**Withdrawal:** symptoms that occur when substance use is decreased or stopped once tolerance has developed. Symptoms can include physical (e.g., headaches, nausea, muscle aches, restless legs) or psychological (e.g., anxiety, depression, hallucinations, isolation) effects.

**SUD is a medical condition that can be treated. Treatment varies by person and depending on the severity and type of SUD.**

If you or anyone you know needs help with SUD, please reach out to a trusted adult, teacher, counsellor, health care provider, or visit [decyde.ca/support-resources/](https://decyde.ca/support-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. Government of Canada. (2024). *About Substance use*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/about-substance-use.html>



# COCAINE USE DISORDER

- ▶ Cocaine can be addictive.
- ▶ Cocaine use disorder is a medical condition and can be treated.

## WHAT COULD COCAINE USE DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

- Using more cocaine than intended or using for a longer time than intended.
- Feeling the need to use cocaine despite recognizing the mental, physical, and social problems it is causing.
- Spending excessive time seeking, using, or recovering from cocaine use.
- Feeling cocaine is the most important thing in their life.
- Experiencing a “crash” when they stop using it, which causes a mood swing from high to low.
- Experiencing intense cravings when not using cocaine.

### Potential Effects

- Mood changes
- Violent/erratic behaviour
- Hallucinations or psychosis
- Respiratory or sinus problems
- Irregular heartbeat
- Digestive issues
- Weight loss
- Increased risk of seizure, stroke or heart attack
- Lowered inhibitions

## TOLERANCE

- Tolerance develops quickly, causing people to use increasingly high doses of cocaine.
- Consuming high doses of cocaine may cause paranoia (intense anxiety/fear and mistrust toward others).
- Taking higher doses also increases the intensity of the “crash” experienced when cocaine use is stopped.
- Tolerance greatly affects the impact of cocaine on an individual. A person with a high tolerance may regularly consume a dose of cocaine that would be fatal to a person with a lower tolerance.

## WITHDRAWAL

### Signs and Symptoms

- Exhaustion
- Restless sleep or insomnia
- Hunger
- Irritability
- Depression
- Thoughts of suicide
- Intense cravings for cocaine
- Restless legs

**The memory of cocaine euphoria is powerful and there is a strong risk of relapse and using the substance again.**

If you or anyone you know needs help with Cocaine Use Disorder, please reach out to a trusted adult, teacher, counsellor, health care provider, or visit <https://decyde.ca/support-resources/>

Learn more about cocaine here:  
[decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants](https://decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants)

#### References:

1. Government of Canada. (2023). *Cocaine and Crack*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/controlled-illegal-drugs/>
2. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2024). *Cocaine*. <https://www.ccsa.ca/cocaine>
3. National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2024). *Cocaine*. <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cocaine>



# ALCOHOL USE DISORDER

- ▶ Alcohol can be addictive.
- ▶ Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) is a medical condition that can be treated.

## WHAT COULD ALCOHOL USE DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

- Challenges in reducing the amount of alcohol consumed.
- Struggles cutting back on alcohol use despite multiple attempts.
- Spending excessive time searching for, drinking, or recovering from alcohol use.
- Feeling a strong craving to drink alcohol.
- Challenges meeting responsibilities at work, home, school, or in social settings.
- Using alcohol in situations where it is unsafe, such as at work or when driving.
- Continuing to use alcohol even when aware that it is harmful to their health.
- Developing a tolerance to alcohol.

### Potential Effects

- Liver disease
- Digestive issues and loss of appetite
- Increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, or stroke
- Interactions with medications
- Increased risk of cancer
- Weakened immune system
- Memory loss
- Lowered inhibitions

## TOLERANCE

- Alcohol tolerance occurs when the body tries to adapt and counteract the effects of prolonged alcohol use.
- Increased tolerance means that a person may drink large quantities of alcohol without seeming intoxicated.
- High alcohol tolerance may lead people to overconsume, increasing the risk of alcohol poisoning and organ damage.

## WITHDRAWAL

### Signs and Symptoms

- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Shaking
- Insomnia
- Nausea/vomiting
- Hallucinations
- Anxiety
- Seizures
- Restless legs

**In severe cases, alcohol withdrawal can be fatal. Some individuals require medical care while withdrawing from alcohol use.**

If you or anyone you know needs help with Alcohol Use Disorder, please reach out to a trusted adult, teacher, counsellor, health care provider or visit <https://decyde.ca/support-resources/>



Learn more about alcohol here:  
[decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#depressants](https://decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#depressants)

#### References:

1. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2024). *Alcohol*. <https://www.ccsa.ca/alcohol>
2. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2020). *Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder*. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-alcohol-use-disorder>
3. American Psychological Association. (2012). *Understanding alcohol use disorders and their treatment*. <https://www.apa.org/topics/substance-use-abuse-addiction/alcohol-disorders>



# CANNABIS USE DISORDER

- ▶ Cannabis can be addictive.
- ▶ Cannabis Use Disorder is a medical condition that can be treated.

For people with a personal or family history of schizophrenia or psychosis, daily cannabis use can increase the risk of experiencing psychosis.

## WHAT COULD CANNABIS USE DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

- Challenges reducing the amount of cannabis consumed.
- Struggles cutting back on cannabis use despite multiple attempts.
- Spending excessive time obtaining or consuming cannabis.
- Feeling an intense craving to use cannabis.
- Challenges meeting responsibilities at work, home, school, or in social settings.
- Using cannabis in situations where it is unsafe, such as at work or when driving.
- Continuing to use cannabis even when aware that it is harmful to their health.
- Developing a tolerance to cannabis (needing more of the substance to feel the desired effect).

### Potential Effects

- Depression and/or anxiety
- Digestive issues
- Increased appetite
- Increased cancer risk
- Impaired thinking and memory
- Lung problems
- Interrupted sleep
- Psychosis

## TOLERANCE

- Tolerance can begin to develop after using cannabis only a couple of times.
- Increased tolerance is a risk factor for developing cannabis use disorder.
- As tolerance increases, people may start to use higher-potency cannabis products, or larger quantities of cannabis get the same effect as before, increasing the risk of experiencing negative effects.
- High-THC cannabis products increase the risk of negative effects such as cognitive problems, mood changes and psychosis.

## WITHDRAWAL

### Signs and Symptoms

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Trouble sleeping
- Depressed mood
- Loss of appetite
- Headaches
- Stomach pain
- Constipation
- Excessive sweating

**Cannabis withdrawal symptoms may start 24-48 hours after stopping use. Symptoms usually last about a week, but may persist for several weeks in those who consume large amounts.**

If you or anyone you know needs help with Cannabis Use Disorder, please reach out to a trusted adult, teacher, counsellor, health care provider or visit <https://decyde.ca/support-resources/>



Learn more about cannabis here:  
[decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#cannabinoids](https://decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#cannabinoids)

#### References:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2024). *Cannabis*. <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cannabis>
2. Government of Canada. (2024). *Addiction to Cannabis*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/health-effects/addiction.html>
3. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2024). *What is cannabis?* <https://www.ccsa.ca/cannabis>



# NICOTINE USE DISORDER

▶ Nicotine is extremely addictive.

▶ Nicotine use disorder is a medical condition and can be treated.

How nicotine is consumed (cigarettes, nicotine pouches, vaping) can have dramatically different impacts to your health.

For more information, visit [decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants](http://decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants)

## WHAT COULD NICOTINE USE DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

- Using more nicotine than you intend to.
- Being unable to quit or reduce nicotine use, even if you want to.
- Continuing to use nicotine even when aware that it is harming your health.
- Continuing to use it even though it causes problems in relationships.
- Having intense cravings and urges to use nicotine.
- Developing a tolerance to nicotine.
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when not using.
- Many people can develop “triggers” for nicotine use, for example, always using nicotine after a meal or when they feel anxious. It can be very difficult to change these patterns.

### Potential Effects

- Increased cancer risk (significantly increased with tobacco)
- Irritability or anxiety
- Heart disease
- Digestive issues and loss of appetite
- Tooth and gum disease
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Lung disease
- Interrupted sleep
- Infertility and impotence

## TOLERANCE

- People who are inexperienced with nicotine may experience nausea and dizziness during use.
- People who consume nicotine regularly adjust and do not experience these symptoms, meaning that they can consume large amounts of nicotine in a short time without feeling sick.
- With increased tolerance, people need to consume more nicotine to get the same effect.
- Increased nicotine use can lead to lung damage, breathing problems, heart disease, digestive issues, and nicotine poisoning.
- Decreased sensitivity to caffeine.

## WITHDRAWAL

### Signs and Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Difficulty concentrating
- Headaches
- Increased appetite
- Increased sensitivity to caffeine

**Withdrawal symptoms will usually stop within a couple of weeks. However, some people may experience cravings for weeks or months after giving up nicotine.**

If you or anyone you know needs help with Nicotine Use Disorder, please reach out to a trusted adult, teacher, counsellor, health care provider, or visit <https://decyde.ca/support-resources/>

Learn more about nicotine here:  
[decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants](http://decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants)

#### References:

1. Government of Canada. (2023). *Smoking, Vaping and Tobacco*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco.html>
2. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (n.d.) *Nicotine Dependence*. <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/nicotine-dependence>
3. Government of Canada. (2023). *Nicotine Addiction*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/health-effects-smoking-second-hand-smoke/nicotine-addiction.html>

# METHAMPHETAMINE USE DISORDER

- Methamphetamine (crystal meth) is extremely addictive.
- Methamphetamine use disorder is a medical condition that can be treated.

## WHAT COULD METHAMPHETAMINE USE DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

- Using more than intended or using for longer periods than intended.
- Struggles to stop using methamphetamine despite multiple attempts.
- Spending excessive time seeking, using, or recovering from methamphetamine.
- Experiencing strong cravings or a powerful urge to use methamphetamine.
- Challenges meeting responsibilities at work, home, school, or in social settings.
- Neglecting important personal, professional, or social activities.
- Placing themselves in risky situations to obtain or use methamphetamine.
- Continuing use even when aware that it is damaging health.

### Potential Effects

- Tooth decay and gum disease
- Hallucinations or psychosis
- Sleep disturbances
- Digestive issues
- Scratching or picking the skin
- Irritability or aggressive behaviours
- Increased heart rate
- Extreme energy
- Risk of seizure, stroke or heart attack
- Lowered inhibitions

## TOLERANCE

- Tolerance develops quickly, causing people to use increasingly high doses of methamphetamine to achieve the same “high” as before.
- Consuming high doses of methamphetamine may cause paranoia (intense anxiety/fear and mistrust toward others), psychosis, and violent behaviours.
- Taking higher doses also increases the intensity of the “crash” experienced after methamphetamine use.

## WITHDRAWAL

### Signs and Symptoms

- Intense fatigue
- Stomach pain
- Hunger
- Headaches
- Shortness of breath
- Depression, anxiety, irritability
- Inability to feel pleasure
- Inability to sleep or excessive sleepiness

**Methamphetamine involves a “crash” period, lasting 1-3 days when withdrawal symptoms are severe. Some symptoms, like sleep issues and cravings, can persist for months.**

If you or anyone you know needs help with Methamphetamine Use Disorder, please reach out to a trusted adult, teacher, counsellor, health care provider or visit

<https://decyde.ca/support-resources/>

Learn more about methamphetamine here:  
[decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants](https://decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#stimulants)

#### References:

1. Government of Canada. (2023). *Methamphetamine*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/controlled-illegal-drugs/methamphetamine.html>
2. National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2011). *What are the long-term effects of methamphetamine misuse?* <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/methamphetamine/what-are-long-term-effects-methamphetamine-misuse>

# ECSTASY USE DISORDER

- ▶ Ecstasy (MDMA) can be addictive.
- ▶ Ecstasy use disorder is a medical condition that can be treated.

## WHAT COULD ECSTASY USE DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

Ecstasy addiction can be difficult to see because there is little evidence to support a physical dependence or withdrawal symptoms when people stop using it. However, people could be considered to have ecstasy use disorder if they:

- Use more of the substance than intended or use for longer periods than intended.
- Cannot stop using ecstasy despite multiple attempts.
- Spend excessive time seeking, using, or recovering from ecstasy.
- Experiencing strong cravings or a powerful urge to use ecstasy.
- Challenges meeting responsibilities at work, home, school, or in social settings.
- Place themselves in risky situations to obtain or use ecstasy.
- Continue use even when aware that it is damaging health.

### Potential Effects

- Kidney or liver damage
- Problems with memory and focus
- Depression, anxiety or paranoia
- Lowered inhibitions
- Impaired judgment
- Chronic insomnia

## TOLERANCE

- Tolerance to ecstasy builds up very quickly. People often have to take more of the substance than they previously took, to achieve the same high as before.
- Frequently taking ecstasy can deplete serotonin and other brain chemicals responsible for feeling emotions happiness and pleasure). This means that people may not achieve the expected ecstasy “high.”

## WITHDRAWAL

### Signs and Symptoms

- Depression, anxiety, irritability
- Intense craving to use ecstasy
- Memory problems
- Trouble focusing
- Sleep disturbances

Learn more about ecstasy here:  
[decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#hallucinogens](http://decyde.ca/substance-snapshots/substance-snapshots/#hallucinogens)

**There is little evidence that stopping ecstasy causes physical withdrawal. However, it can cause numerous mental symptoms that are harmful to a person's mental health.**

If you or anyone you know needs help with Ecstasy Use Disorder, please reach out to a trusted adult, teacher, counsellor, health care provider or visit <https://decyde.ca/support-resources/>

#### References:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2024). *MDMA (Ecstasy/Molly)*. <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/mdma-ecstasy-molly>.
2. Hoffman, R. (2023). *MDMA (Ecstasy) Intoxication*. <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/mdma-ecstasy-intoxication>
3. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (n.d.) *Ecstasy*. <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/ecstasy>