



# Acknowledging the Risks of Substance Use

**Substance use** refers to the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, either occasionally or regularly. It can range from recreational use to more problematic patterns that may lead to substance use disorders, where individuals become dependent or experience negative impacts on their health, relationships, and daily functioning.

## Physical Health Risks

- **Liver Damage:** Chronic substance use can lead to liver damage and diseases.
- **Heart Problems:** Chronic substance use increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and heart attacks.
- **Respiratory Issues:** Smoking is linked to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, bronchitis, and lung cancer.
- **Neurological Damage:** Substance use can lead to long-term brain damage.
- **Kidney Damage:** Prolonged substance use can lead to kidney disease and failure.
- **Gastrointestinal Problems:** Alcohol can cause ulcers and pancreatitis, while opioids can lead to constipation and other issues.
- **Infections:** Substance use can increase behaviors that elevate the risk of infections.
- **Weakened Immune System:** Regular substance use can make individuals more susceptible to infections and diseases.
- **Death:** Overdose is a significant risk with many substances, potentially leading to respiratory failure, coma, and death.

## Mental Health Risks

- **Mood Disorders:** Substance use is linked to depression and anxiety. The chemicals in many substances can disrupt brain chemistry, which regulates mood.
- **Cognitive Impairment:** Chronic use of alcohol and other drugs can impair both short- and long-term memory.
- **Difficulty with Decision Making:** Drugs and alcohol impact the brain's executive functions, leading to poor decision-making and impaired judgment.
- **Cognitive Decline:** Long-term substance use can result in lasting cognitive impairment, affecting learning, reasoning, and the ability to process information.
- **Increased Risk of Psychosis:** Some substances can induce psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, or paranoia, especially with heavy use.
- **Psychiatric Disorders:** Certain substances can trigger or worsen pre-existing mental health conditions.
- **Suicide and Self-Harm:** Substance use may increase the risk of self-harm or suicide.
- **Impulsive Behavior:** Substance use can lower inhibitions, leading to impulsive actions.
- **Personality Changes:** Long-term substance use can alter one's personality, leading to irritability, aggression, mood swings, or emotional numbness.

Substance use can have a wide range of health risks. Reach out to the EAP for information and support.