Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Factsheet

What are the warning signs of dependence on drugs?



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year:

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Cannabis, Drugs (General), Emerging Drugs (“Legal Highs”), "Ice" (Methamphetamine), MDMA/Ecstasy

Tags: warning signs, behavioural changes

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

What are the warning signs?

The following signs indicate that a person may be dependent on, or addicted to, alcohol or other drugs:

- They say that their alcohol or other drug use is out of control.
- They are using more alcohol or drugs, or seem to be less affected by the same amount.
- The drug or alcohol are consumed in larger amounts, or over a longer period of time, than intended.
- They worry about their drug or alcohol use.
- They tell you they want to stop using, cut down, or control their use.
- They find it hard to stop using, or to go without alcohol or drugs.
- Missing an opportunity to use alcohol or other drugs makes them feel anxious or worried.
- Much of their time is taken up by drug-related activities (for example, obtaining and using the drug, recovering from its effects).
- Other work, social or recreational activities are reduced or completely given up in order to make more time for the drug or alcohol.
- Their alcohol or other drug use is affecting their relationships with friends, family, and their community.
- They are unable to carry out normal responsibilities such as school, work, or family time.

It’s important to remember that people may not show all the signs listed above and may still be developing dependence. See our factsheet for guidance about starting the conversation when you are concerned about drug and alcohol use.

If you’re worried that your child may be using alcohol or other drugs, remember that effective support is available.
Please see our “Where to get help” page for services available to young people with drug or alcohol related issues, or for those wanting general information.

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University.

© 2026 Positive Choices | Built by Netfront