

Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders

Are you unable to stop using alcohol or other substances?

Are you having persistent thoughts of reliving past gambling experiences?

Do you find yourself having an impaired control over gaming behavior, like starting when you know you should not or having difficulty stopping?

Here we explore the symptoms and treatment for several types of substance-related and addictive disorders.



What are Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders?



A person with substance use disorder finds it difficult to control their use of a specific substance. They continue to use a substance or engage in addictive behavior, even though there is clear evidence of harm.

In addition to the substance-related disorders, sufferers of gambling disorder and gaming disorder exhibit many similarities to those who have substance addictions. Specifically, they have an urge to continuously gamble or play digital games despite having harmful negative consequences.

Substance Use Disorders



Not all people who use a substances will have substance use problems. Substance use problems occur when a person is using alcohol or other drugs (e.g., caffeine, cannabis, hallucinogens, opioids, inhalants, sedatives, hypnotics, stimulants, tobacco) at levels that are associated with short-term or long-term harm.

Substance use disorders are medical conditions in which the use of one or more substances leads to a clinically significant impairment or distress and the person continues to take the substance(s) despite experiencing problems. Substance use disorders are characterized by an array of mental, behavioral and physical symptoms that may cause problems related to loss of control, strain to one's interpersonal life, hazardous use, tolerance and withdrawal symptoms.

Symptoms

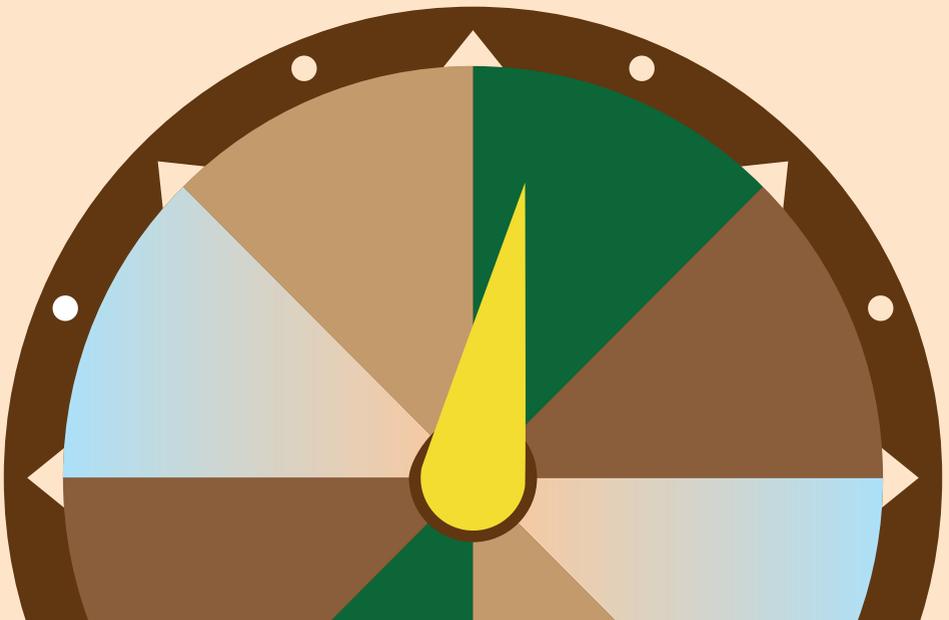
- Take substance in larger amounts or for longer than you are meant to.
- Want to cut down or stop using the substance but not manage to.
- Spend a lot of time to get, use, or recover from the use of the substance.
- Crave for the substance.
- Not able to do what you should at work, home, or school because of substance use.
- Continue to use, even when it causes problems in relationships.
- Give up important social, occupational, or recreational activities because of substance use.
- Use substances again and again, even when it puts you in danger.
- Continue to use, even when you know you have a physical or psychological problem that could have been caused or made worse by the substance.
- Need more of the substance to get the effect you want (tolerance).
- Development of withdrawal symptoms, which can be relieved by taking more of the substance.

Gambling Disorder

Gambling disorder involves repeated problematic gambling behavior that causes significant problems or distress. It is also called gambling addiction or compulsive gambling. People with gambling disorder can crave for gambling in the same way that someone craves for alcohol or other substances. Compulsive gambling can lead to financial problems, difficult relationships and work impairment, not to mention potential legal issues. People with gambling disorder often hide their behavior. They may lie to family members and others in order to cover up their behavior and may turn to others for help when financial problems surface. Some gamblers are seeking excitement in gambling, others are looking for escape or numbing.

Symptoms

- Need to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve the desired excitement.
- Restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
- Make repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
- Often preoccupied with gambling (e.g., having persistent thoughts of reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money for gambling).
- Often gamble when feeling distressed (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
- After losing money at gambling, often returns to gambling on another day to get even ("chasing" one's losses).
- Tell lies to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
- Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.
- Rely on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situation caused by gambling.



Gaming Disorder

Gaming disorder is defined in the International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision (ICD-11) as a pattern of recurrent gaming behavior (“digital-gaming” or “video-gaming”) characterized by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.

Symptoms

For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the behavior pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months. Pathological gaming behavior is more than merely having lots of time spent on gaming but also involves:

- Impaired control over gaming behavior, such as unable to inhibit the starting when you know you should not and unable to stop once started.
- Turned more and more attention to gaming rather than to other things and people.
- Continued or intensified gaming despite negative consequences.

Gaming addiction causes harm to physical and mental health. It is associated with poor nutrition, lack of exercise, vision and hearing difficulties. It is also associated with depression, anxiety, social anxiety, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.



Causes

Substance-related and addictive disorders are complex which and can often result in significant consequences. Substances produce a euphoric feeling by triggering large amount of dopamine in brain regions that are responsible for the feeling of reward. Addiction occurs when the use of substance takes over these reward circuits in brain and thus increases the urge to consume more and more of the substance in order to achieve the same rewarding effect. This contributes to on-going difficulties in abstaining from the addictive substance or behaviours, and the person becomes psychologically dependent.



Is Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders Treatable?

Substance-related disorders typically emerge during adolescence and often progress in severity and complexity with continued substance misuse. Treatment for substance use disorder is effective and improves individuals' productivity, health and overall quality of life by helping them to stop or reduce harmful substance misuse, improve their health and social functioning, and manage their risk for relapse. Treatment options include residential treatment (voluntary in-patient or residential drug rehabilitation programmes, psychological and behavioral treatments (e.g., Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), out-patient Methadone Treatment Programme, or a combination of these approaches.

For gambling and gaming disorders, treatment programs are not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy treatment sessions have shown promising results in treating gambling and gaming disorders. Family therapy can also be beneficial to the addicted gambler or gamer. It addresses not only the issue of addiction but heals family relationships for recovery together.

Medication can sometimes be a valuable part of the recovery protocol. Consult doctors, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists or Student Counselors for more help and advice.



Support and Self-help

Developing a substance-related and addictive disorders is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness, and it takes more than willpower to overcome the problem. Please do not try to handle it alone but reach out for support. The more people you can turn to for encouragement, guidance, and support, the better your chances for recovery.

We encourage you to.....

- Lean on close friends and family.
- Build a sober social network that is free from addiction.
- Build a meaningful substance-free life.
- Learn healthy ways to cope with stress.
- Do not let relapse keep you down.

References

American Psychiatric Association

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gambling-disorder/what-is-gambling-disorder>

HelpGuide

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/overcoming-drug-addiction.htm>

Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112>

Narcotics Division Security Bureau, HKSAR

<https://www.nd.gov.hk/en/6-1-2.htm>

PsychGuides

<https://www.psychguides.com/behavioral-disorders/gambling-addiction/treatment/>
<https://www.psychguides.com/behavioral-disorders/video-game-addiction/treatment/>

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals

Integrated Center on Addiction Prevention & Treatment

<http://icapt.tungwahcsd.org/>

World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/features/qa/gaming-disorder/en/>



Professional Help-seeking

The University provides counseling services for undergraduate and postgraduate students. You may check out Counselors' profiles on our webpage and make an online appointment with us. Three weeks' advance reservation is allowed. All personal information and details shared and discussed in counseling or therapy sessions are strictly confidential.

Counseling and Wellness Center

🏠 Room 5003 (via lift 3) ☎ (852) 2358 6696
🌐 <http://counsel.ust.hk> ✉ counsel@ust.hk

24/7 HEARing ☎ (852) 8208 2688

This is a 24-hour helpline that supports exclusively all HKUST students 7 days a week. The service is made available by our Counselors in collaboration with the Christian Family Service Center.



Meet Our Counselors