



Stress Induced Substance Abuse

Stress can be a major factor in the development of a substance use disorder. Extreme emotional stressors such as ongoing interpersonal conflict, the loss of a long-term relationship, death of a loved one, or loss of a child can greatly increase the probability of addiction.

For many employees, their job may be a constant source of stress, and work stressors have been linked to drug and alcohol abuse in numerous research studies.

A stressful workplace undermines employee health, safety, and productivity. Stress-induced substance abuse can result in on-the-job accidents, impaired performance, poor attendance, high employee turnover, and increased healthcare costs.

While stress is a normal part of life, acute or chronic stress is a risk factor for many physical, mental, and emotional disorders, including addiction. Additionally, chronic stress is a barrier to recovery for people in active addiction, and it is a risk factor for relapse.

Self-medicating with drugs or alcohol to cope with stress only makes life more difficult and adds to stress levels. This results in an endless cycle of stress, drug seeking, drug craving, substance abuse, and more stress.

Dealing with Workplace Stress

Attempting to cope with stress by abusing drugs or alcohol can lead to long-term problems like anxiety disorders, high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, and other serious diseases.

There are healthy ways to deal with stress that have been proven to work. The American Psychological Association recommends the following:

Keep track of your stressors by keeping a journal for a week or two to identify which situations cause the most stress and how you react in each case. Taking notes can help you find patterns and learn better coping mechanisms.

Instead of attempting to fight stress with drugs or alcohol, do your best to make healthy choices when you feel stressed. Exercise, yoga, hobbies, and time with family are just a few examples.

Establish work/life boundaries that make it possible to not feel pressured 24 hours a day. Something as simple as not checking emails when you are off work or not answering the phone during dinner can make a big difference.

Take time off to recharge and relax as often as possible. It's critical that you disconnect from time to time. So don't let your vacation days go to waste!

Learn relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, and mindfulness. Just taking a walk or enjoying a meal can help tremendously.

Stress management resources may be available through your employer. Many companies offer employee assistance programs, online information, counseling, and referral to mental health professionals.

The following suicide prevention information, while provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, will also be helpful to those in states other than Georgia. All online resources listed are available to users nationwide.

With May's Mental Health Awareness Month already in the rear-view mirror, and Suicide Prevention Month on the horizon in September, it is vital that we continue to make progress every month in raising awareness about mental illness and that we spend time learning how to improve our daily mental health. Though Mental Health

Awareness Month was established in the US way back in 1949, we still have a long way to go as a culture in fighting the stigma attached to mental illness, and it is something that needs our attention during the other eleven months of the year as well.

For many of us, when we hear the word health by itself, it presents as a positive word associated with good physical health routines like a healthy diet, exercise, restfulness, etc. If we are speaking about it in a negative way, a qualifier is usually required like poor health, or health issues. Yet when many of us hear the term mental health, we immediately relate this term to mental illness or what would be considered poor mental health, instead requiring a qualifier to make it a positive term like good mental health.

The origin of this stigma is largely due to a previous lack of understanding when it came to mental disorders, coupled with a heavy dose of superstition. But then again, it wasn't that far back in our history that we were using leeches to remove bad humors from the body to prevent illness and performing surgeries with unwashed and ungloved hands. In both instances we have come a long way, but when it comes to our physical health, we are far more comfortable talking about it openly and discussing things like our diet and exercise routine with friends then we are discussing our mental health. And when our friends, family members, coworkers, and community members have a health issue or suffer from an injury, we have protocols in place on how to offer our support. Conversely, even though nearly one in five Americans live with a mental health diagnosis, we are ill prepared to offer our support when those same people suffer from mental illness and are far less likely to speak openly or to seek help when we ourselves are dealing with mental illness.

We know that if we don't take care of our bodies by watching what we eat and getting exercise, we increase our chances of developing things like hypertension, high cholesterol, and diabetes, all of which can lead to life threatening events like heart attacks and strokes. And when we lose the people that we love in this way, we

come together to mourn their passing and we celebrate the life they lived and the lives they touched. Similarly, when we don't take care of our mental health and we don't seek treatment for things like anxiety and depression, or don't take steps to help us process and heal from trauma, our lives become increasingly at risk for death by suicide, which is a leading cause of death in the US. But when we do lose friends, family, and community members to suicide, there is no protocol. We rarely blame individuals who die from a health condition for not taking better care of themselves, but we often do blame individuals who die by suicide due to mental illness or substance abuse.

So, what can we do to improve our mental health and help manage mental illness? A good place to start is being more mindful of how we treat our mental health vs. our physical health and how we offer support to those we care about who may be dealing with mental illness. Our brains are organs, and our mental and physical health are intertwined, so a whole-health approach to wellness, treatment, and support are essential to our overall wellbeing as a culture and as a nation. If you are worried that someone you care about may be suffering from a mental illness, don't let that stigma and fear stop you from offering your support. And if you are in crisis and suffering from mental illness, don't be afraid to get support. 988 is the new, three-digit number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL). It is now available nationwide and it's a direct connection to caring support for anyone in mental health distress.

If you experience any thoughts about suicide, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255**.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact the Suicide Prevention Director, Rachael Holloman, at:
rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255).



Supervisor Newsletter

Supervising Employees in Recovery

When an employee tests positive for drugs, employers can either fire that individual, or allow him to keep his job if he agrees to receive substance abuse treatment and counseling. After the employee completes the treatment program and returns to work, supervisors will need to understand the recovery process, as well as the role that continued employment can have in the employee's rehabilitation.

Many people who suffer from addiction never agree to getting help. An individual who has chosen to accept treatment has taken the most difficult first step in recovery. This person, out of gratitude, could end up being a long-term, good, hard-working, loyal employee.

However, for substance abuse treatment to work, a recovering individual will need to feel supported by his or her supervisor and coworkers. Feeling like the workplace is another place where they will be judged or outcasted will only decrease their working performance as well as their self-worth and ability to stay clean.

If recovering individuals feel they are being supported by their managers and staff, they will experience an increase in self-esteem, and higher self-esteem is linked to better mental health. Considering that many addictions are co-occurring with depression and anxiety, it is important for these individuals to begin to see value in their lives and progress in the things they are doing to improve themselves.

The Importance of Employment

Working helps recovering individuals achieve progress in therapy because it gives them a purpose. Supervisors can play an important part in a recovering employee's mental health improvement simply by being a good role model, displaying kindness, and listening to these struggling individuals.

Often, due to discrimination and the stigma that exists for people in recovery, finding mentors, or people who are non-drug users, to motivate them to fight their addiction is challenging, but vital for successful recovery.

It's common for a person in recovery to experience the loss of contact with friends and family members due to their addiction. Many people suffering from

addiction find that they have very few people left in their social circle who are not also users. Since being friends only with other addicted individuals can create a greater risk of relapse, having the ability to interact with coworkers through employment can give those in recovery an increased sense of hope. Non-users can even act as mentors for people struggling with addiction as they begin to see a different life path to strive for, helping them feel less stuck in the repetitive cycle of relapse.

Scheduling and Assignment Flexibility

An employee who is in recovery may need help with his or her work schedule. Rapid schedule changes are not often beneficial for people in recovery. Since these employees may still be going to counseling or therapy sessions every week, it is best if a supervisor can help them establish a routine in their schedule. This will help them gain a sense of grounding in life and know what the next day will bring.

When allocating tasks to a recovering addict, it is best to be as clear as possible. These types of workers need to know exactly what is expected of them and should not be left to figure out tasks for themselves as this can induce a sense of pressure or stress that is not best suited for the recovery process.

Value of Allowing Treatment and Recovery

Supervisors might initially feel annoyed at having to make exceptions for an employee who is in recovery, but many recovering individuals will prove to be the hardest workers you can employ. Recovered addicts understand what they have to lose and are continually working to make their lives better.

Without employment, it is more difficult for people recovering from a substance use disorder to establish a sense of independence or a will to continue therapy. Oftentimes, these individuals who have lost their job become dependent on family members or government aid for financial support, leading to a decreased self-esteem, thus a greater chance of relapsing. Having employment gives people a purpose and something to work towards. As they begin to develop more financial independence, they will experience an increase in self-esteem.

Allowing an employee who has tested positive for drugs to keep their job and enter treatment can provide them with an opportunity to change the future of their lives. If they truly want to start living a sober life and rebuild their reputation, you will have provided them with the chance to accomplish this.