

HPN EAP Newsletter for Employees

Cross Dependency: The Hidden Dangers



Perhaps you know someone who is recovering from a destructive relationship with alcohol or other drugs. If so, you probably know that it is extremely dangerous for that person to take even the smallest amount of the former "drug of choice." What you may not know is that it is also dangerous for that person to take many other substances, including some prescription drugs and over-the-counter remedies.

A recovering person is at high risk for cross-dependency. A new substance or non-drug activity may become a new addiction or contribute to a relapse into the old one. Knowing about cross-dependency can help prevent new addictions and relapses for a recovering person.

How It Happens

Often, people originally begin taking drugs as a way of dealing with unpleasant emotions. Fear, anxiety, anger, depression, low self-esteem and loneliness can all be characteristics of a basic feeling of spiritual emptiness or incompleteness. A chemically dependent person may have gotten into the habit of "filling" the emptiness with the effects of the drug. A recovering person comes face-to-face with all the feelings that were covered up, and they may believe there is no danger in "taking a little something" to calm or comfort oneself.

Unfortunately, the danger is great. Dependency on one drug often creates a cross-dependence for similar drugs. A high dose of the new drug is needed to produce the same effect that a new, nondependent user would get from a small dose. This means that a strong new addiction can be created much more quickly than the original, as the user tries to use the new drug to duplicate the pleasant effects of the old one.

Even if cross-tolerance is not present, the effects of a new drug sometimes weaken a recovering person's resolve not to take the original substance, leading to a relapse into the old addiction. People can even become cross-dependent on activities, such as compulsive eating, prolonged exercise, or unhealthy relationships. These are also dangerous to proper health and the recovery process.

If you know someone who is chemically dependent and recovering:

- Avoid offering them alcohol, drugs, appetite suppressants or over-the-counter remedies.
- Ask them if they know about cross-dependency, or give them a copy of this article.

If you are chemically dependent:

- Be sure to tell your doctor that you are chemically dependent before accepting any prescription
- Avoid using appetite suppressants, decongestants, sleeping pills or cough syrups
- Abstain from using alcohol or so-called "recreational" drugs, including beer, wine, marijuana and cocaine, and be moderate about eating and exercise. If you have difficulty with this, your employee assistance program can help by referring you to health professionals who are knowledgeable about dependency issues, treatment programs or local 12-step programs
- Spend time with others who are recovering from chemical dependencies and follow the spiritual path of your choice

Call Health Promotion Northwest at 360-788-6565 for more information and services.

