



Caution: Trouble Ahead

How to Spot the Hidden Signs of Addiction

By *Brian Nolan*

According to a [Columbia University study](#), more than 40 million Americans meet the clinical criteria for addiction, and another estimated 80 million are considered to be “risky substance users,” making addiction America’s most neglected disease.

If substance abuse is so common, then why don’t we hear more about it? And why don’t more people seek treatment?

Stigma is one reason addiction stays in the shadows. Addiction is often viewed as a moral weakness or failing rather than a disease requiring careful treatment and recovery. Another reason is that many addictive substances are illegal or purchased through criminal means. Addiction is a hidden disease, and the addict is invested in keeping it that way, putting their health and their relationships at risk.

How do you know?

So, how can you tell if someone you know or care about has a problem with substances? There are some common signs that can help you spot addiction:

Changes in behavior—Unexplained changes in routines and habits can be signs of addiction, including staying up or sleeping in later than usual, going out more frequently, hanging out with a whole new group of friends and/or isolating from old friends.

Mood swings—Alcohol and chemical substances are powerful psychoactive agents that can have dramatic effects on mood including angry outbursts, depression, anxiety, agitation, fatigue, or rapidly changing emotions.

Secrecy—Unexplained absences, self-imposed isolation, lack of accountability, denial and/or lying can all be ways of hiding addictive behavior from friends, family and co-workers. Finding hidden stashes of alcohol or substances is a clear sign there is a problem.

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Money troubles—Money is often an issue in drug addiction, as substances are often costly to acquire. It is not uncommon for an addict to run through their life savings, borrow money from friends and family, and even steal to keep their habit going.

Deteriorating health—Addiction is hard on the body. In addition to being “hung over,” substance abusers often have a host of physical complaints and chronic pain. Poor nutrition and lack of sleep can also compound health problems.

What can you do?

Pay attention. Trust your gut. Educate yourself about the disease of addiction. Have open and frank discussions about substance abuse concerns, but approach the topic from a place of love and concern not with ultimatums and control. And definitely reach out for support!

If you or someone you care about is struggling with addiction, Next Step Recovery can help you take the next step toward healing. For more than 11 years, our highly structured transitional living program has helped men recover from alcohol, opioid and other substance abuse challenges. For more information, visit us at www.nextsteprecovery.com, call us at 828-350-9960 or email me at brian@nextsteprecovery.com.

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