

Understanding Addiction: Dual Diagnosis

We've come a long way in understanding the causes and underlying factors that cause one to suffer addiction. What was once verboten has become accepted, not as an embarrassment but as a genuine illness that can be managed that should not be shamed. But we're still learning, and with new knowledge comes a better path forward.

The pain of dealing with substance abuse can render one feeling helpless. But what some addicts don't realize is that feeling of helplessness may also be a symptom. A Dual Diagnosis was not even on physicians' radars until around 40 years ago. Without professional help, they can often be difficult to detect, one masking something equally as damaging as the other.

What is a Dual Diagnosis?

According to [mentalhelp](#), up 60% of those with a substance abuse addiction also suffer from another mental health or behavioral disorder. This is known as a dual diagnosis or co-occurring disorder. We've come a long way in a short time in the field of psychology. Beginning with deinstitutionalization in 1955, the practice grew in both popularity and acceptance. With a fresh, new generation in the 80s, the concept of a dual diagnosis was first put forth.

Since then, we've come to understand mental health disorders, particularly how they relate to addiction. Often, these disorders are, in fact, the underlying cause of the addiction.

Certain disorders that are commonly linked to substance abuse include:

Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)

People with ADHD are more likely to abuse substances to cope with their condition. People living with ADHD are prescribed stimulants to treat symptoms, which can be habit-forming.

Bipolar Disorder

According to [addictioncenter](#), about half of people with bipolar disorder are also battling substance abuse. Alcohol and other drugs can temporarily relieve some of the emotional pain associated with the condition and help soothe manic episodes.

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

People with BPD have symptoms of impulsivity and intense emotion. Roughly two-thirds of people diagnosed with BPD have turned to substance abuse at some point in their lives.

Depression

One in 10 Americans suffer from depression, and many with that diagnosis have said they've used drugs or alcohol to cope with their mental anguish. This kind of self-medication often worsens the problem, as the withdrawal from the substance only compounds their depression.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders come from a general feeling of inferiority to others. Appetite suppressants can be habit-forming.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

GAD is the most common disorder in America, affecting around 18 percent of adults. Symptoms can include insomnia, muscle pain, difficulty concentrating, and an overall sense of uneasiness. Physicians commonly treat this with benzodiazepines, which can be extremely habit-forming. People with GAD are also more likely to use other substances to cope with the symptoms.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is not the charming quirk you often see in pop culture; it can actually be quite debilitating. People suffering from OCD will have a number of unwanted obsessions and compulsions. They may have an irrational fear of something like germs and feel the need to clean frequently. There are many variations on the illness, and it can lead a sufferer to experience depression or anxiety. Given the clear link to substance abuse and depression, OCD is not far removed.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD sufferer's brains produce less endorphins than a normal, healthy brain. This makes them more likely to turn to substances to feel happy. The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs said that nearly 75 percent of all soldiers who experienced traumatic violence during combat turned to substance abuse more than once.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia causes delusional thinking and sometimes visual and auditory hallucinations. It's difficult to diagnose substance abuse alongside schizophrenia, as both conditions can share the same effects.

The "Other" Dual Diagnosis

Often, patients with underlying health problems and physical disabilities can become reliant on substances. Whether they're trying to ease physical pain or suffering depression due to their limitations, it can easily trigger an addiction to painkillers, alcohol, or other substances.

Signs You May Have A Dual Diagnosis

A dual diagnosis is not always easy to pinpoint. As you can see, substance abuse and mental health disorders are symbiotic; they feed off and complement one another. As a result, if not

correctly diagnosed, someone under the assumption they only suffer from addiction could be setting themselves up for a relapse.

There are a few telltale signs that may indicate a dual diagnosis, including;

You Use Drugs As An Escape

If you feel your life has become unmanageable without drugs, it may be a sign of a mental disorder. For instance, many people take up drinking to cope with a divorce, a bad breakup, loss of employment, or other such difficulties. They may think that they're just "drinking to forget" or "letting off some steam" and may even believe it's temporary.

But many start to feel that using drugs is the only way to escape. At this point, you're coping with more than everyday stress or going through difficulties. You may well be suffering from depression.

Trying to Quit Makes You Violent, To Yourself or Others

Withdrawal is never easy, and it gets worse the longer you use drugs. Quitting, however, should never make one feel hopeless or suicidal.

Some symptoms when you're trying to quit are perfectly normal. You may find yourself feeling angry, anxious, or having a hard time concentrating. But if you find yourself losing control, or can't stand it any longer, then some additional help is necessary.

People with a dual diagnosis trying to quit will have thoughts of suicide or self-harm. They'll experience flashbacks to traumatic events, or they'll be overcome with fear. This can also lead to lashing out aggressively toward people who have not provoked them.

This can have some severe repercussions, including a risk of suicide, job loss, risky sexual behavior, poor healthcare, and difficulty in relationships.

You Feel More Like Yourself On Drugs

Substance abuse is commonly used as an escape. But some abuse drugs to make them feel more normal. This is especially true of those using drugs to treat conditions such as ADHD, BPD, or OCD, where the drug may help relieve symptoms, but can quickly become addictive.

A History of Mental Illness Is Not Something To Ignore

One of the best indicators of a dual diagnosis is your medical history. If you have a history of mental illness, it will likely play a role in your substance abuse. Mental illnesses don't just go away on their own, and without being addressed, they'll eventually rear their heads in ways you may not have expected.

This is also true of your family's mental health history. Mental illness can run in the family, and there is a genetic link to some conditions.

A Multi-Pronged Path Forward: Treating a Dual Diagnosis

As a mental illness can give way to a substance addiction, so too can a substance addiction induce a mental illness. They're tragically symbiotic, to your detriment. As such, several factors overlap, both aggravating the conditions.

Brain responses, genetics, triggers, and exposure at an early age are all things that will spur on an addiction.

Whichever came first, it can often be difficult to tell. But whatever the case, it's vital to find a treatment plan tailored to treat both conditions simultaneously. In this case, this can often mean the best form of treatment starts at an inpatient rehab center, where a safe, structured environment can be maintained.

Part of the reason an inpatient's environment is ideal is the special attention afforded to each patient. A treatment plan for a dual diagnosis should include, first and foremost, a clear identification of the problems at hand. From there, one should outline short and long-term goals, then establish approaches to meet those goals. This is known as an integrated treatment plan, recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration as a best practice for treating co-occurring disorders.

Integrated treatment plans sometimes also include additional support, including housing, employment, and socialization programs. Research has shown that people who have participated in integrated treatment programs are more likely to stay sober – which is the program's ultimate goal.

An integrated treatment plan is not just one treatment approach but integrates many, utilizing effective counseling, behavioral therapy, and medication when necessary.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is used to explore and challenge a person's thoughts and beliefs to change their behaviors. Dialectical Behavioral Therapy can be employed to treat BPD by reducing negative actions like self-harm, including substance abuse.

A patient may be introduced to contingency management, which provides small incentives (i.e., A trip to the movies, a candy, or even an A.A. chip) for those who succeed in remaining sober. Motivation enhancement may also be used to encourage sobriety.

And mutual support groups for others with similar dual diagnoses can provide the emotional support a patient needs to recognize they're not alone.

Additionally, if detoxification is needed upon arrival, staff and physicians will be there to prescribe the appropriate medication for a medically managed detox.

After leaving the inpatient center, outpatient care should be provided with the opportunity for patients to receive similar services they did at inpatient care, emphasizing re-entering society safely without relapse. Gradually, these services will grow less intensive as the patient starts to carve a new path forward.

Famous Cases of A Dual Diagnosis

You don't have to look far to realize you're not alone, and there are several very notable cases of a dual diagnosis that may help you recognize something in yourself. Here are just a few recent examples of behavior in the press that were later linked to a dual diagnosis.

We take no joy in pointing gawking at a person's misfortune. Unfortunately, the tacky tabloids play these cases up for their entertainment value rather than take any lessons from their unfortunate circumstances.

Amanda Bynes

Bynes grew a following out of her Nickelodeon shows, but was more recently known for exhibiting odd behavior and vulgar tweets. After being arrested for driving while intoxicated, Bynes checked herself into rehab, where she was diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. As you can see from the ways these mental disorders can lead to substance abuse, her arrest can be considered a symptom.

Mel Gibson

It's hard to forget Mel Gibson's racist rants after being pulled over in Malibu. Gibson says he's struggled with alcohol since he was a young teen, which along with his bipolar disorder, led to the unpleasant arrest. We mentioned that exposure at a young age could be a contributing factor, and Gibson is probably the most famous case of a dual diagnosis in recent history.

Get Help Today

There's much more to life, and we can help you discover it. If you, or someone you love, suffer from alcohol or any other substance addiction, then help is just a step away. Visit or call APNlodge today.