

## **AM I ADDICTED?**

### **What is a substance?**

Substance is something that alters the body's functioning when it enters the body. Examples may be alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, cocaine, marijuana, volatile substances, etc. The effects of these substances are different from each other. Some accelerate one's system and some slow it down. Some may cause one to see and/or hear hallucinations.

### **Why someone uses a substance?**

Substance use may have many different reasons. Curiosity heads the list. The desire to have fun, having friends who use alcohol or drugs and conformity to the group may cause one to use a substance. Avoiding painful situations and/or overwhelming feelings may also trigger substance use. Furthermore, some others use substance because s/he is addicted and can't stand its absence. Myths about substance may also bring about substance use. For example, 'Substance increases self-esteem, make people work/study better, make people happier, have more fun' etc. The biggest of these myths is the one that 'using a substance occasionally is harmless'

### **Effects of Substances**

#### **Mental and physical:**

- Although it seems to be a good way of avoiding problems at first, substance use increases shyness, anxiety, unhappiness and loneliness.
- It gives a temporary confidence, happiness or peace. However, when its effects subside, unhappiness and worries come back more intensely.
- Substance use itself is a source of psychological disturbance. Alcohol may cause depression. Other substances may result in insomnia, depression, anxiety disorders, sexual dysfunctions, addiction, etc. Some substances may trigger psychosis (loss of contact with reality).
- Substance use makes harming oneself easier.
- It may hinder the power to say no to an unwanted sexual intercourse.
- A lot of accidents happen when a person is intoxicated, since substance weakens the reflexes.
- In the long run, all kinds of substances (even the most natural ones) cause serious health problems.

#### **Social effects**

- Substance use eases engaging in behavior that may harm self or others such as traffic accidents, fights.
- It may set off legal problems. In our country, it is forbidden to have available and use narcotic substances. Alcohol use is free, but drunk driving is forbidden.
- Substance use may give rise to financial problems since they are expensive. This may cause trouble for an addict.
- Constant use restricts the social environment. One may start seeing only certain people.
- Long term use of alcohol negatively affects sexual life.

### **Am I an addict?**

If several of the following criteria are present, it is possible to consider addiction:

- Gradual increase in the quantity of the substance that you use.
- When you decrease the quantity of or totally quit the substance, the presence of withdrawal symptoms such as discomfort, inability to sleep, tremors.
- Continuation of the use despite the physical, mental, social or legal problems that it causes.
- Loss of control over the substance and using more than planned.
- Spending most of the time by the substance.
- Neglecting personal and communal responsibilities (such as family, school or work) because of the substance.

### **Who becomes addict?**

Addicts don't have certain personal qualities, everyone can be an addict. Addiction has nothing to do with willpower. Everybody starts by saying 'I can control, I have strength of will'. However, as the substance is used, a physiological process beyond the willpower starts off. Usually, the use is occasional at first. In time, more of the substance is needed in order to attain the same effect. Even if it is occasional, long-term use of a substance alters the mental and physical

structures of a person.

After becoming an addict, a vicious circle, which is very difficult to break, starts between using and quitting:

### **What can I do to have control?**

It is important to take measures before you become an addict.

1. Make a list of the costs and benefits of substance use. This list displays clearly the harm that is done by the substance and may help you to make a decision.
2. Keep a one-week journal of your alcohol and/or substance use. Think about what you may change in your life in order to reduce your use or to quit.
3. Talk to someone you trust about this issue.
4. Think about the social pressures that make you use. You may attend less to the social events and environments that create this pressure (such as clubs, parties)
5. Think about the feelings that make you use. You may try different methods to deal with these feelings. Facing the feelings, sharing with friends and getting professional help are only a few of the alternatives.
6. Try not using the substance for a month. Let's see if you will succeed in not using? In addition, let's see how you will alternatively deal with the negative situations and feelings that you go through. Consider yourself, your life and problems once again when you are conscious.
7. If the suggestions above are not enough to help you, if you want to get more information about the issue or if you want to get help, see the Psychological Counselors at your school or another mental health professional.

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### **For More Information**

Psychological Counselling Department

(The services are available only to the students and staff of İstanbul Bilgi University.)

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