

STAGES OF ADDICTION

Alcohol and drug abuse have developmental stages that a person goes through as they progress to an addiction or dependence on a mood-altering substance. An understanding of these stages and recognition of corresponding signs and symptoms can help identify an alcohol/drug abuse problem. Following are the four stages that will be the focus of this article:

Early Stage – Living and Abusing

- Self-diagnosing, self-medicating
- Use of another person's prescription medication
- Growing preoccupation with alcohol/drug use
- Growing need for a drink in times of stress
- Uncomfortable in situation without alcohol
- Drinks before or after social occasions
- Hides and protects alcohol/drug supply
- Growing tolerance to a substance
- Projects blame for drinking/use on to others

In this stage, the drinking or drug use may appear harmless to the individual. The ingestion of alcohol or drugs is perceived to occur without the experience of any serious, adverse consequences.

Middle Stage – Living to Abuse

- Use of drugs that can cause harm or injury to the abuser and other people
- Tries to control drinking/drug use by forced abstinence
- Binge drinking
- Drinking/using alone
- Grandiose or aggressive behavior
- Job, family or legal problems
- Guilt about behavior when drinking or using drugs

At some point, the individual crosses from abuse into addiction. There is continued use of alcohol or other drugs in spite of problematic consequences.

Late Stage –Abusing to Live

- Tremors and/or shakes
- Impaired thinking
- Early morning drinking
- Physical health deteriorates
- Loss of family and friends
- May be unable to work
- Hospitalizations

At this point in the progression of the addiction, the alcoholic/addict is using mood-altering substances at all costs. They are using to feel normal. A very serious pathological relationship to a mood-altering substance has developed.

Chronic Stage

Life threatening problems are evident. If the disease is not arrested at this stage, it can be fatal through accidents, medical illnesses related to use, accidental overdoses and suicides.

Addiction to alcohol or drugs can be arrested at any stage through treatment and a healthy recovery program. Please contact the NE LAP if our assistance for a Nebraska health service professional with alcohol/drug problems would be helpful.

Sources: Care First, Alcoholism.about.com and alcohol-drug treatment.net.

Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program

Alcohol/Drug assistance for health service professionals, certified or registered by the State of Nebraska