

Comorbidity or dual diagnosis - Opioid addiction, part 9

Comorbidity means two or more illnesses happening in the same person. They can happen at the same time or one after the other. Comorbidity also means that each of the illnesses can make the other one worse. When a person has a substance abuse problem as well as one or more mental disorders, this comorbidity is called **dual diagnosis**.



More than half of people who have drug or alcohol problems also have a mental health problem, such as:

- **Depression**, which makes them feel very sad and tired
- **Anxiety**, which makes them feel nervous, worried, and afraid
- **Bipolar disorder**, which makes their moods change back and forth
- **ADHD**, also called **attention deficit hyperactivity disorder**, which makes it hard to pay attention and focus



Is Drug Addiction a Mental Illness?

Yes. Addiction changes the brain and disrupts a person's normal needs and desires. The drug user becomes focused on getting and using the drug. Drug-seeking behaviors weaken the drug user's ability to control impulses, even if bad things occur. This is similar to the symptoms of other mental illnesses.

Why Do These Illnesses Happen Together?

Although substance use disorders often occur with other mental illnesses, this does not mean that one caused the other.

Research suggests that:

- Drug abuse may increase the symptoms of another mental illness.
- Mental disorders can lead to drug abuse, possibly as a way to **self-medicate**. Self-medicating means misusing a drug to try to reduce the symptoms of a mental illness.



Both illnesses may share risk factors, such as:

- Genetic traits
- Environmental factors such as stress, trauma, and drug use early in life
- Involvement of similar areas of the brain

- Developmental disorders that often begin in the teen or younger years, when the brain is changing quickly



A drug problem can make a mental health illness worse. And a mental health illness can make a drug problem worse. Someone with both of these diagnoses needs treatment for both illnesses in order to get better.



People and their family members who are dealing with mental or substance use disorders, or both, can call the National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357. This is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service. It is available in English and Spanish. The National Helpline provides referrals to local treatment centers, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free brochures and other information.

Text is from opioid information sources from the Department of Health and Human Services and adapted by HealthReach and Healthy Roads Media. This project has been funded in whole or in part with Federal funds by the National Library of Medicine award number HHSN2762015000111 awarded to the Center for Public Service Communications. Images from iStock.com.

Creation Date: September 2017