

DUAL DIAGNOSIS: Substance Abuse plus Emotional Problems

What is Dual Diagnosis?

A person who has both an alcohol or drug problem and an emotional/psychiatric problem is said to have a dual diagnosis. To recover fully, the person needs treatment for both problems.

How Common Is Dual Diagnosis?

Dual diagnosis is more common than you might imagine. According to a report published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association*:

- Thirty-seven percent of alcohol abusers and fifty-three percent of drug abusers also have at least one serious mental illness.
- Of all people diagnosed as mentally ill, 29 percent abuse either alcohol or drugs.

What Kind of Mental or Emotional Problems are Seen in People with Dual Diagnosis?

The following psychiatric problems are common to occur in dual diagnosis - i.e., in tandem with alcohol or drug dependency.

- Depressive disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder.
- Anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and phobias.
- Other psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia and personality disorders.

If a Person Does Have Both an Alcohol/Drug Problem and an Emotional Problem, Which Should Be Treated First?

Ideally, both problems should be treated simultaneously. For any substance abuser, however, the first step in treatment must be detoxification - a period of time during which the body is allowed to cleanse itself of alcohol or drugs. Ideally, detoxification may take place under medical supervision. It can take a few days to a week or more, depending on what substances the person abused and for how long.

What Is Next After Detoxification?

Once detoxification is completed, it's time for dual treatment; rehabilitation for the alcohol or drug problem and treatment for the psychiatric problem.

Rehabilitation for a substance abuse problem usually involves individual and group psychotherapy, education about alcohol and drugs, exercise, proper nutrition, and participation in a 12-step recovery program such as Alcoholics Anonymous. The idea is not just to stay off booze and drugs, but to learn to enjoy life without these "crutches."

Treatment for a psychiatric problem depends upon the diagnosis. For most disorders, individual and group therapy as well as medications are recommended. Expressive therapies and education about the particular psychiatric condition are often useful adjuncts. A support group of other people who are recovering from the same condition may also prove highly beneficial. Adjunct treatment, such as occupational or expressive therapy, can help individuals better understand and communicate their feelings or develop better problem-solving or decision-making skills.

For more information about depression, click on the following website:

<http://www.nmha.org/index.cfm?objectid=C7DF9405-1372-4D20-C89D7BD2CD1CA1B9>