

## Women and dual diagnosis

The risks of dual diagnosis for women are different from men. Women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety and are at higher risk of dual diagnosis if they have bipolar disorder.

## Someone I love is showing signs of dual diagnosis. What should I do?

- » Do not blame yourself or the person suffering from dual diagnosis
- » Try and talk to the person about how they are feeling
- » Let them know you are worried and that they can talk to you
- » Encourage your loved one to speak to a professional for help. Offer to go with them as support.
- » If a person is reluctant to seek help, visit the doctor yourself for advice.

Sometimes people may feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or ashamed to seek help. They may also not be aware of the support that is available help seeking options.

On the back are some options for where someone might seek help. It is important to remember that professionals are there to help you, not judge you, and they are required to keep your information confidential.

## When should you seek help?

You should talk to your loved one or encourage them to see a doctor if you start noticing the following signs:

- » They stop talking to family or friends
- » They become afraid or suspicious for no reason
- » They sleep poorly or are often awake all night
- » They develop strange ideas
- » They hear voices no one else can hear
- » They are less motivated, more irritable, anxious and aggressive
- » They are regularly getting into trouble with the law
- » They have difficulty concentrating
- » They say or write things that don't make sense
- » They abuse drugs or alcohol

## Where to get help

There are several places you can contact for help:

**Your General Practitioner**

**Emergency Department Public or Private Hospital**

**LIFELINE: 13 11 14 – 24 hr. Crisis line and support**

**DIRECTLINE: 1800 888 236 – 24 hr. Confidential alcohol and drug counselling and referral line**

**DRUG INFO: 1300 858 584 – Information for carers on drugs in different languages**

**SANE: 1800 187 263 Information about mental health treatments, symptoms, support and help for carers. Information available in other languages**



## Alcohol, Drug and Mental illness information for people living in Australia

ENGLISH

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## Problems with alcohol, drugs and mental illness

Where a person has two or more illnesses or disorders at the same time such as alcohol and drug and mental illness this is commonly known as 'dual diagnosis'. One example of dual diagnosis is when a person has both a mental illness and substance use problem. The type of drugs can be both legal (alcohol, tobacco, prescription medication) and illegal drugs (cannabis, speed, and heroin).

The co-occurrence of a mental illness and substance abuse problem can occur in all communities. It is not uncommon for someone suffering with anxiety or depression to also have a drug or alcohol problem.

## What can cause dual diagnosis?

There are a number of reasons why mental illness and substance abuse may co-occur. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- » Coping with difficult life changes such as migration and settlement
- » Impact of stress and trauma
- » Substance abuse might influence or increase symptoms of mental illness
- » A person with a mental illness may misuse drugs to help cope with an illness or side effects of medication, or to feel confident around other people
- » A person with a mental illness may misuse drugs to feel good, to belong to a group, to escape boredom or to help sleep

## What are some common characteristics of dual diagnosis?

People experience dual diagnosis differently. Someone with depression or anxiety may overuse alcohol to cope with the challenges they face. Alternatively, cannabis use might increase the risk of a psychotic episode in someone who is already vulnerable to psychosis. Psychosis is a mental disorder where a person may hallucinate and have trouble telling the difference between what is real and what is not.

It is not easy to separate the behaviours of a mental illness and that of a drug problem, yet it is important to notice when someone's behaviour begins to change. Here are some characteristics that might inform and alert you.

- » Feelings of depression, anger or mood swings
- » Difficulties getting organised
- » Relationship problems and isolation
- » Accommodation issues (homelessness or regularly moving from one place to another)
- » Increased criminal activity
- » Demonstration of poorer physical health and self-care
- » Lack of social support
- » Financial issues
- » Suicidal thinking or self-harm
- » Relapsing to substance use
- » Increased hospital admissions
- » Resistance to or non-compliance with treatment and recovery programs

## Young people and dual diagnosis

Young people, in general, tend to experiment more, particularly with substances which can put them at greater risk of experiencing symptoms of mental illness. Young people from culturally diverse backgrounds are at increased risk of developing psychological and substance-use problems due to the following issues combined with the changes and challenges of adolescence.

- » Negotiating between two or more cultures
- » Dealing with loss of family members, friends and aspects of original culture
- » Experiences of discrimination and racism
- » Grief and memories of past torture and trauma
- » Difficulties with schooling and finding employment
- » Learning a new language and culture
- » Negotiating family and community expectations
- » Peer pressure