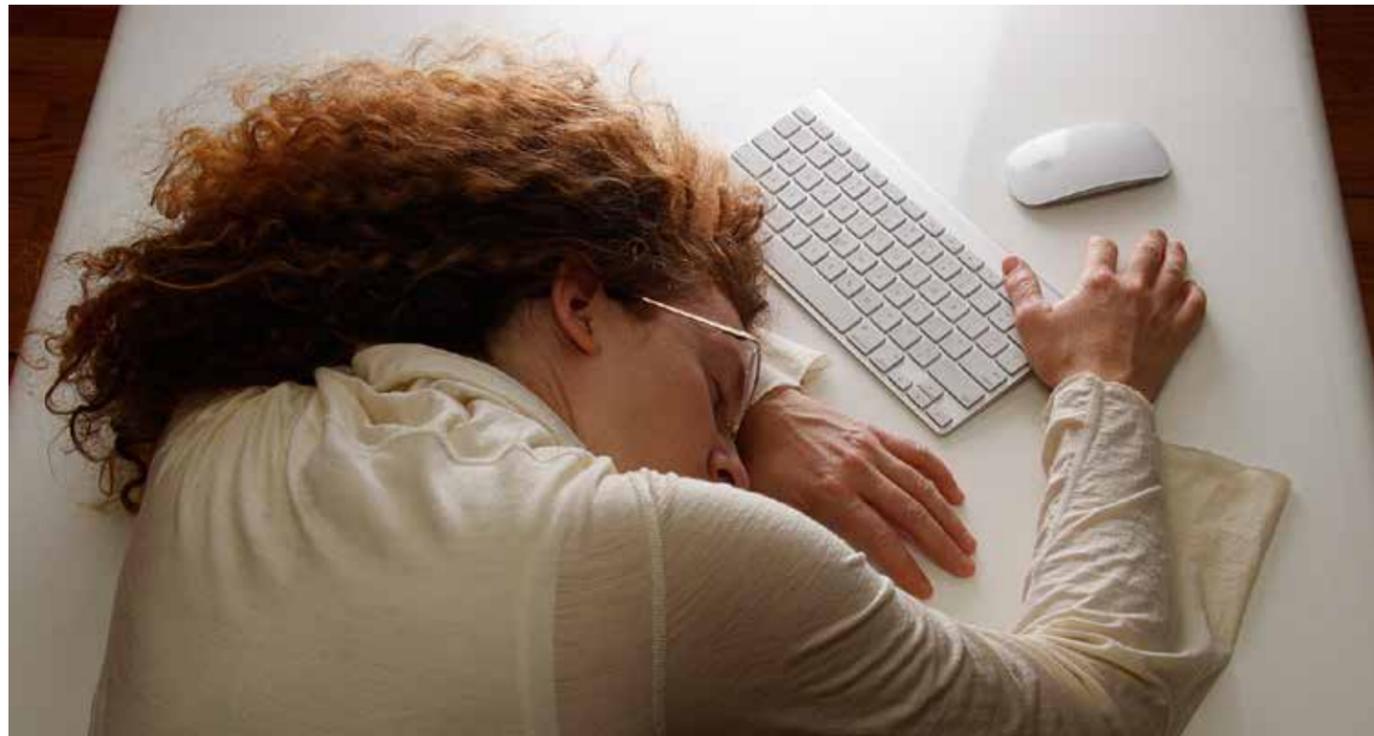


It's all fun and games  
until there's an accident.



The third week of November is designated as National Addictions Awareness Week. The purpose of this week is to heighten awareness about issues related to the misuse of alcohol and drugs.

The impact of substance misuse affects not only individuals but their families, workplaces and the communities in which they live.



### Addiction Simply Defined

Why do people become dependent on a substance? Sometimes this occurs for individuals experiencing stress, anxiety, pain or some other negative situation. Should someone happen to try having a drink or using a drug, he or she could feel the sensation that the distress is gone. Feeling relaxed and perhaps more social, a person could have a tendency to repeat the use of alcohol or drugs to find refuge from the stress, anxiety, or pain.

People with addictions are typically unaware that there are healthier and more effective alternatives for dealing with their emotional problems. Once made aware of other ways to cope, most people experience a return of hope that different behaviours can replace substance use. An important part of recovery is coming to the realization that addiction has

nothing to do with weakness or a suspension of moral values. Instead, addiction should be regarded as simply a coping response which can be replaced with healthier and more effective ones.

The message here is not that kicking an addiction is easy. It may well become a person's greatest challenge. Dependency on a substance can be overcome given determination and finding support to tackle it.

### Resistance and Denial

Sometimes people claim that they don't want to know "the score" about substance abuse. There is also belief that the problem is just a personal one and the person thinks it doesn't matter because "I'm only hurting myself." The reality is that a lot of other people are affected both friends and family as well as others outside one's immediate relationships. Drug use, abuse, or addiction among employees

and their family members negatively impacts the economy. Businesses and industry sectors experience financial effects from lost productivity, absenteeism, injuries, fatalities, theft and the effects of low employee morale. There are also effects on businesses' liabilities and in their workers' compensation costs. Perhaps the greatest financial impact is on the costs to the health care system.

Some of the problems in the workplace caused by drug abuse include:

- After-effects of substance use (withdrawal) affecting job performance

- Preoccupation with obtaining and using substances while at work; interfering with attention and concentration

- Illegal activities at work including selling illegal drugs to other employees

Psychological or stress-related effects due to drug use by a family member, friend or co-worker which affect another person's job performance

**Estimated Costs:** Drug abuse costs employers \$24.3 billion in Canada\* and \$81 billion annually\*\* in the United States.

\*Source: The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

\*\*Source: National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Inc. (NCADD)

**Fact:** Workers who report having three or more jobs in the previous five years are about twice as likely to be current or past year users of illegal drugs as those who have had two or fewer jobs.

(NCADD Fact Sheet: Alcohol and Other Drugs in the Workplace.)

This means businesses have to endure high turnover—which is expensive. And, employees who lose their job due to unsatisfactory performance also suffer financially, as do their families and loved ones.

The fallout from drug abuse and addiction reaches well beyond the individual.

### Skewed Perceptions

"I know that I don't have an addiction because I support my family, work full time, pay my bills and my taxes. I'm not some crack addict living in an alley."

Seventy percent of the estimated millions of people in North America who use drugs are employed so only 30% of addicted individuals don't have employment.

Addiction has nothing to do with whether you pay bills or not or whether you live in a house

or an alley. Addiction is the unhealthy psycho-physiological dependence on a substance. It is this use of a substance to manage or control physical or emotional pain. Individuals who misuse substances sometimes are unaware that the pain, stress, or emotions that they attempt to control through the substance can be managed by other more healthy means. This behaviour is called self-medicating.

Healthier and more effective ways to cope with life's challenges are available.

A person can argue that. "I only smoke a single joint every night after work—it's not hurting anyone."

But, there are many negative consequences to this behaviour and many more potential consequences (risks). Even with minimal use typical work-related consequences can include:

### Job Performance

- Inconsistent work quality; missing deadlines; avoiding responsibilities

- Poor concentration and lack of focus

- Lowered productivity or erratic work patterns

- Increased absenteeism with unexplained absences or improbable excuses

- Unexplained disappearances from the jobsite

- Carelessness, mistakes or errors in judgment

- Needless risk taking

- Disregard for safety of self and others on the job, and off the job accidents

- Extended lunch periods; frequent breaks and early departures

### Workplace Behaviour

- Frequent financial problems

- Avoiding friends and colleagues

- Blaming others for own problems and shortcomings

- Deterioration in personal appearance, grooming, or personal hygiene

- Complaints, excuses and time off for vaguely defined illnesses or family problems

- Excessive talkativeness, paranoia, impatience with others

- Stealing or frequent borrowing from colleagues

Because there are serious consequences of addiction (occupational and personal) it is critical for individuals to have a clear and accurate understanding and definition of addiction. It is also important to understand there are more effective ways to cope with life's challenges than using drugs or alcohol.



**This is the CAGE questionnaire.  
Answering “yes” to two or more points is considered clinically significant.**

- C** Have you ever tried to CUT down on your drinking and weren't successful?
- A** Have you ever been ANNOYED by people criticizing your drinking?
- G** Do you ever feel GUILTY about your drinking or behaviour when drinking?
- E** Have you EVER had a drink first thing in the morning to steady nerves?

Additional resources are available to help individuals make an assessment of the degree of dependency on alcohol or drugs. The National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence (NCADD) website (<http://ncadd.org/index.php>) offers free and confidential tests which can help a person to make a realistic assessment of the individual's behaviour.

Despite having easy access to this resource, it is important to remember that online tests are

only guidelines and should be relied upon only as an indication of addiction or dependence levels. They are meant to be used as educational tools and to encourage people to seek expert evaluation and treatment.

Test scores need to be interpreted within the context of other relevant factors such as: the length of time the substance has been used; the person's age; level of consumption; and other data which is more properly

interpreted by someone skilled in addictions assessment

Tests are a good first step in understanding substance use/misuse and potentially a first step in acknowledging and treating an addiction.

If you need help or want better clarity about this issue, seek assistance from your local Walmsley counsellor. Contact us at <http://walmsley.ca/contact/>