

Live Well, Work Well

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September 2021

September is National Recovery Month, a whole month dedicated to those who stood up and admitted they had a problem with drugs or alcohol use ... There are many resources out there, some even anonymous, that can help with the recovery process and maintaining a substance-free life.

Substance abuse

What are these substances, and how are people abusing them? According to the World Health Organization, “substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs.” This also includes legal prescription drugs that are not taken as directed or are sold on the street to those without a prescription, thus making them illicit. It can be intended abuse or unintended, meaning some people choose to take the drug simply for the feeling or experience it gives them, whereas others can have it prescribed for a medical reason and become addicted unintentionally.

There has been a lot of controversy surrounding addiction and whether it is in fact a disease. Someone who has never been addicted may think otherwise, but addiction has been classified as a chronic brain disease. While addiction is a chronic disease, it is preventable and treatable, just like diabetes, asthma or heart disease. Addiction rewires the brain to make us feel rewarded when we feed it the drug, the same brain reaction we feel when we eat or exercise. Drug use, though, takes this reward system to the extreme: It rewires the brain in harmful ways and creates the need for the drug in order to be rewarded. A powerful statement written by Shatterproof, a national nonprofit organization to end the devastation of addiction, states, “Once someone is addicted, they’re not using drugs to feel good — they’re using drugs to feel normal.” This statement speaks volumes into the perspective of an addict, that likely the first time they used was for pleasure, but once the rewiring of the brain took place, it became extremely difficult to control the need for the drug.

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Mental health and substance use disorders affect people from all backgrounds and age groups. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 7.9 million adults have co-occurring disorders, and rates were highest among adults ages 26-49. It has been found that people with mental health disorders are more likely to experience a substance use disorder. If you feel you may have a substance use disorder, here are some signs and symptoms to look for:

- Intense urges to use the drug that block out other thoughts
- Needing more of the drug for the same effect
- Spending money on the drug instead of other life necessities
- Not meeting social obligations or work responsibilities
- Failing in attempts to stop using
- Spending more time getting the drug, using the drug and recovering from the effects of the drug than other important activities
- Committing crimes or deceit just to get the drug

There is no shame in admitting there is a problem. September is National Recovery Month, a whole month dedicated to those who stood up and admitted they had a problem with drugs or alcohol use. It is easy to sweep the problem under the rug, to hide it from loved ones and use the drugs or alcohol to help cope with the guilt of having to hide it from family or friends. It is a vicious cycle, and that cycle can be broken. There are many resources out there, some even anonymous, that can help with the recovery process and maintaining a substance-free life. Contact your doctor or view the resources at the end of the newsletter to find the right recovery tools and start a new life!

What about the kids?

It is so important to talk to kids early about substance abuse, street drugs, prescription drugs and alcohol; it could save their life. Let them know that it only takes one pill or one alcoholic beverage to become addicted.

Kids have so much exposure between school, TV, music and the internet. We as parents don't always have the time or know-how to check in and see what they are watching or hearing. It's important that you make the time to learn how to use the devices they are using and listen to the music they are listening to. If we are unable to monitor these things, how do we think we are going to be able to monitor any substance abuse? To make it even more difficult, there are now counterfeit drugs hitting the streets, drugs that look like they came from the pharmacy but did not. These drugs are extremely dangerous and have been reported as being "laced" with other illicit drugs such as fentanyl (opioid) in deadly doses, meaning one pill can be fatal.

It is incredibly important to educate ourselves on the signs and symptoms of drug use in our kids. We all know teenagers are already full of angst, but we can't always chalk it up to "being a teenager"; sometimes there is more to their story. Here are some ways to recognize unhealthy drug use and address it right away:

- Sudden problems at school or work — missing days, lack of interest in activities, drop in grades and/or performance
- Physical health problems — decreased energy and motivation, weight gain or loss, bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils
- Lack of self-care — not caring about their appearance or hygiene practices
- Behavior changes — being secretive about personal space and friends, places they're going and with whom
- Money — requests without reasonable explanation, missing money or items stolen from the home, defensiveness when questioned about what the money is for

It is important to remember when dealing with a child or an adult with a substance use disorder that you remain sympathetic. The best way to go about getting information is to be calm and understanding. It makes sense for us to blame them and tell them to "just quit," but it's not always that easy. Addiction is very hard to control, and relapse will likely happen even if they vow to you that they will quit. Be patient and provide judgment-free support along with resources, support groups, therapy and medical interventions. If the person feels supported and loved throughout the process, their likelihood of quitting will be higher.



Enjoy a hot, comforting bowl of chicken noodle soup to get through the tough times.

Creamy chicken noodle soup

TOTAL TIME: Prep: 5 minutes,
Cook: 30 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 small white onion, diced
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/3 cup flour
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 3 cups cooked shredded chicken
- 2 cups uncooked egg noodles or pasta (I used “wide” egg noodles)
- 1 (12 oz.) can evaporated skim milk
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp. ground black pepper
- 1/4 tsp. dried thyme
- Chopped fresh parsley (optional garnish)



Directions

Heat oil over medium-high heat in a large stockpot or Dutch oven. Sauté onion, carrots and celery for 7 minutes. Add garlic and cook for an additional minute. Sprinkle flour over vegetables, and cook and stir for an additional minute. Gradually stir in broth and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer, partially covered, for 10-15 minutes.

Add remaining ingredients and stir to combine. Cook for 10 minutes or until noodles are al dente. Season with additional salt and pepper or seasonings if needed.

Serve warm, garnished with fresh parsley if desired.



NEED A LITTLE HELP GETTING YOUR HEALTH ON TRACK?

If you find yourself wanting more, seeking a plan, or needing assistance to execute your own plan for better health, reach out to your Lockton Nurse Advocate. They can help you create a plan, provide information and resources, as well as offer ongoing support to get you where you want to be.

Do you have a topic you want to learn more about, or feedback about past topics or articles?

Please feel free to contact the author at:
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RESOURCES: www.shatterproof.org, www.samhsa.gov, www.who.int, www.mayoclinic.org, www.gimmesomeoven.com