



UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE ABUSE: SIGNS AND IMPACTS



Substance abuse is defined as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. It also includes the misuse of prescription medications. Common substances of abuse include alcohol, cannabis, opioids, and stimulants. Each substance has unique effects and risks, and it's important to be aware of the potential dangers associated with each. Recognising the signs of misuse of each substance is a key step in promoting a healthier and healthy workplace environment.

Risks and impact of substance abuse in the workplace

Decreased productivity	Increased absenteeism
Substance abuse leads to decreased productivity and performance due to impaired cognitive function and physical abilities, creating financial losses.	Increased absenteeism and tardiness result from substance abuse, disrupting workflow and creating additional burdens for colleagues.
Higher accident rates	Impaired judgement
Substance abuse increases the likelihood of accidents and injuries, endangering both the individual and their coworkers, so workplace safety is critical.	Substance abuse impairs judgment and decision-making, potentially leading to legal and ethical problems for the individual and the organisation.

Recognising the signs: What to look for

Behavioural changes: Changes in behaviour, mood swings, and increased irritability are potential signs of substance abuse. Look for sudden shifts in personality or demeanour.

Hygiene neglect: A decline in personal hygiene and appearance may indicate a struggle with substance abuse. Noticeable changes in grooming habits can be a red flag.

Attendance issues: Frequent absences or late arrivals can be a sign of underlying issues related to substance abuse. Patterns of absenteeism should be noted and addressed.

Physical symptoms: Noticeable physical symptoms, such as bloodshot eyes or tremors, may indicate substance abuse. However, interns should report concerns to appropriate personnel instead of self-diagnosing.

Prevention strategies

Open communication: Encourage open communication and support among colleagues, fostering a culture of trust and understanding that addresses concerns early on.

Stress reduction: Promote stress-reduction techniques, such as mindfulness, exercise, and healthy eating, offering avenues for managing stress and preventing burnout.

Wellness programmes: Join in wellness workshops and activities offered by the HSRC which create a supportive environment where employees prioritise their health and well-being. Participate in teams and support each other.

Culture of respect: Foster a culture of respect and inclusivity, ensuring everyone feels valued and supported. This helps avoid burnout and respects the boundaries of others.

For more info or assistance, kindly contact your Employee Wellness Practitioner at wellness@hsrc.ac.za - Alternatively, contact our external service provider, Lyra South Africa, on Toll-free: 0800 597 272/ Email: callback@icas.co.za