



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to:

## Dual Diagnosis (Mental Illness & Substance Abuse)

Dual diagnosis is a term used by medical professionals to refer to a person who has both a chemical dependence problem and a psychiatric disorder. Dual diagnosis is a common condition that affects over ten million people in the United States. In fact, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill suggests that over 50 percent of the mentally ill population also have a substance abuse problem.

Dr. Harry Hustig, author of *Managing Schizophrenia in the Community* reports that 72 percent of patients with schizophrenia use drugs to get high, an equal amount use them to avoid depression, and 15 percent use drugs to reduce the side effects. The drugs most commonly used by people who are dual-

diagnosed are alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, and prescription drugs, such as tranquilizers and sleeping pills. The Journal of the American Medical Association reports that 37 percent of alcohol abusers and 53 percent of drug abusers have at least one serious mental illness. The five major mental illnesses that most frequently co-exist with chemical dependence are schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, anxiety disorders, and organic mental disorders.

Both mental illness and chemical dependence are known to have powerful effects on an individual's thoughts, feelings, physical health, behavior, and overall way of life. People who are dual diagnosed are also known to experience family and employment problems, incarceration, and an increased need for acute health care services. Katie Evans, C.A.D.C., author of *Dual Diagnosis: Counseling the Mentally Ill Substance Abuser*, "The dual diagnosis person's situation is one where the whole problem is greater than the sum of the parts, since the two disorders inevitably exacerbate each other."

Although the causes of dual diagnosis is not yet clear, the Connecticut Association of Addiction Professionals offers the following three main theories of the possible causes:

1. THE PERSON'S SPECIAL MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION MAY COME FIRST. THE INDIVIDUAL MAY THEN USE SUBSTANCES TO TRY TO EASE THE SYMPTOMS OF THE MENTAL CONDITION OR TO FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE AROUND OTHERS.

2. THE PERSON MAY HAVE A SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEM INITIALLY, WHICH OVER TIME AFFECTS BRAIN FUNCTIONING, AND BEHAVIOR. SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS MAY DEVELOP FROM THIS USE AND ABUSE OF SUBSTANCES.

3. A PERSON MAY HAVE BOTH AT THE SAME TIME. EVEN THOUGH ONE DOES NOT CAUSE THE OTHER, THEY AFFECT AND INFLUENCE EACH OTHER IN WAYS THAT BRING ABOUT DANGEROUS SITUATIONS AND CREATE COMPLEX NEEDS.

### Mental Illness

- Confused thinking
- Denial of obvious problems
- Substance abuse
- Prolonged depression
- Suicidal thoughts
- Feelings of extreme highs & lows
- Excessive fears and worries
- Social Withdrawal
- Changes in eating/sleeping habits
- Strong feelings of anger
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments

### Substance Abuse

- Deterioration of hygiene
- Drastic gain or loss of weight
- Poor sleeping habits
- Poor motivation: loss of interest
- Rapid emotion change: becomes easily upset
- Does not complete tasks or take responsibility
- Occasional lack of coordination: stumbles, appears confused
- Anxiety: appears nervous and/or agitated



## Treatments for Dual Diagnosis

The most effective form of dual diagnosis treatment is to have both conditions treated simultaneously. However, the first step in treatment must be detoxification - a period of time in which the body is allowed to cleanse itself of alcohol and drugs. Once detoxification is complete a medical professional will be better able to assess the individual's condition and report the primary problem.

Treatment for both illnesses often consist of counseling sessions, education, and participation in a support group. Through the Dual Recovery Anonymous support group, individuals with a dual diagnosis and their families can find fellowship and tools to prevent relapse while improving the quality of their lives.



## The Twelve Parallels of Dual Diagnosis

- by the Mental Health and Chemical Dependency web site ([www.intotem.buffnet.com](http://www.intotem.buffnet.com))

1. Both diseases affect all areas of lives: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.
2. Mental illness and chemical dependency are both physical diseases which may run in families.
3. If a person does not get help the illness may get worse, and may lead to death.
4. Denial is a major symptom of both diseases; difficulty in accepting treatment is another.
5. Both diseases can cause a person to lose control of his/her behavior, thoughts, and emotions.
6. Loss of control leads to feelings of guilt, shame, depression, and despair.
7. Both diseases affect family and other relationships.
8. Both can led to emotional pain and isolation, which makes us more sensitive to everyday stress.
9. Symptoms of each disease and loss of control improve with treatment.
10. Recovery consists of: stabilization of the acute disease.
11. Relapse in one disease often leads to relapse in the other.
12. There is hope for recovery and symptom stabilization with a combination of treatment and support groups.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

**Web Site** [www.portagepath.org](http://www.portagepath.org)

**Appointments** 330-253-3100  
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

**Support Hotline** 330-434-9144  
888-434-8878



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