

PCP Abuse and Dependence

What is PCP abuse and dependence?

PCP, or phencyclidine hydrochloride, is an illegal drug that causes you to see, hear, and feel things that are not real. PCP causes intense mood swings that can lead to violence or suicide. It has other names, including angel dust. PCP can be smoked, snorted, injected, or taken by mouth.

PCP abuse and dependence is a pattern of using PCP that leads to serious personal, family and health problems. Abuse is when you keep taking PCP even though it causes a problem such as:

- Showing up late or missing work or school and not caring about things that used to matter to you
- Breaking rules or breaking the law
- Not keeping promises, arguing, or even getting violent with other people
- Doing things that are dangerous, such as driving while under the influence

If you continue to abuse PCP, you can become dependent. When you are dependent on PCP, you:

- Need to use more and more PCP or use it more often to get the same effects
- Lose control, which means you keep using PCP even though you know that it is harmful to you or others or you can't stop using PCP when you try
- Crave drugs so much that you spend a lot of time and energy getting drugs, using drugs, and getting over the effects
- Have withdrawal symptoms when you stop using PCP

Dependence is also called addiction.

PCP powerfully affects some of the chemicals of the body and brain that change mood and emotions. Extreme reactions can make users act very strange. They can be violent against themselves or others. Occasionally, heart or lung failure can occur.

What is the cause?

PCP changes the way your body and brain work. When you use PCP, your brain starts to get used to it. As a result, you think about PCP all the time, you don't feel good unless you use PCP, and you may act different when you use it. If you suddenly stop using PCP, the balance of chemicals in your brain changes, which causes the symptoms of withdrawal.

You have a higher risk of becoming dependent on drugs if you:

- Have a family history of drug or alcohol abuse
- Have abused alcohol or drugs in the past
- Are easily frustrated, have trouble dealing with stress, or feel like you aren't good enough
- Are regularly around people who use alcohol or drugs

- Have a mental health problem
- Have constant pain

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of PCP abuse or dependence depend on how much and how often you take the drug. The symptoms can be mild to severe, and may include:

- Being irritable and feeling ready for a fight
- Feelings of suspicion and mistrust
- An extreme belief in your importance or believing that you have special powers no one else has
- Exaggerated feeling of happiness
- An abnormal awareness of sounds
- Nausea or vomiting
- Being out of touch with reality and believing things that are not true or seeing, hearing or feeling things that are not real
- Trouble thinking, remembering, and talking
- Thoughts of suicide

These symptoms can last up to a year after you stop using PCP.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask how much and how often you use PCP. Be honest about your drug use. Your provider needs this information to give you the right treatment. He will also ask about your symptoms, medical history and give you a physical exam. You may have tests or scans to help make a diagnosis.

How is it treated?

PCP abuse and dependence can be treated. For any treatment to be successful, you must want to stop using PCP. When you stop using PCP, your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to help you get through withdrawal symptoms. Do not try to use alcohol and other drugs to reduce withdrawal symptoms.

If you are abusing or dependent on PCP and want to quit, get help.

Self-help groups, support groups, and therapy may be helpful. You might be treated in a substance abuse treatment program. Your healthcare providers and counselors will work with you to develop a treatment program. If this therapy does not work, you may need treatment in a hospital or a treatment center. You may need to stay for several weeks, or you may be able to go in each day.

Recovery from dependence is a long-term process. Follow-up treatment is very important so that you don't go back to abusing drugs.

If you have overdosed, or are having severe withdrawal symptoms you will need to be treated in a hospital. You may be given medicine to reduce high blood pressure, control a fast heart rate, or treat seizures.

How can I take care of myself?

The best way to help yourself is to see your healthcare provider and make plans to stop taking PCP. If you are already seeing a healthcare provider, it is important to take the full course of treatment he prescribes.

- **Get support.** Talk with family and friends. Consider joining a support group in your area.
- **Learn to manage stress.** Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle. Find ways to relax, for example take up a hobby, listen to music, watch movies, or take walks. Try deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed.
- **Take care of your physical health.** Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a healthy diet. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, quit. Don't use alcohol or drugs. Exercise according to your healthcare provider's instructions.
- **Avoid situations where people are likely to use alcohol or drugs.**
- **Check your medicines.** To help prevent problems, tell your healthcare provider and pharmacist about all of the medicines, natural remedies, vitamins, and other supplements that you take. Take all medicines as directed by your provider or therapist. It is very important to take your medicine even when you are feeling and thinking well. Without the medicine, your symptoms may not improve or may get worse. Talk to your provider if you have problems taking your medicine or if the medicines don't seem to be working.
- **Contact your healthcare provider or therapist** if you have any questions or your symptoms seem to be getting worse.
- **Keep trying.** Many people try more than once to quit using PCP before they finally succeed. So, never say, "I can't." You CAN learn to live without PCP in your daily life.

People and resources in your community that can help you include your healthcare providers, therapists, support groups, mental health centers, and alcohol or substance abuse treatment programs.

You may want to contact:

- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
800-622-2255
<http://www.ncadd.org>

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