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## How Substance Abuse Prevents Healing from PTSD

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There is no doubt that you want to heal from PTSD. No one wants to live with the suffering of that disorder. But are you aware of how your substance abuse is preventing you from healing from PTSD? The following list may help.

★ Check off (✓) any that feel true for you.

### **ABUSING SUBSTANCES . . .**

**Makes PTSD symptoms worse.** Substances can make you feel more depressed, more suicidal, and less stable. Even if substance abuse appears to “solve” some PTSD symptoms for a short while (such as getting to sleep or “numbing out” for a few hours), in the long run it never solves them.

**Prevents you from knowing yourself.** With substances, *you* get lost. To heal from PTSD, you need to become more and more aware of who you really are—without substances.

**Does not get your needs met.** You may be using substances to feel loved, to accept yourself, to feel less pain, or to feel nurtured. However, substances cannot give you these. You need to learn safe coping methods to gratify these very important needs.

**Stalls your emotional development.** Although you may be an adult in terms of your age, emotionally you may have become “stuck” somewhere earlier in your development, due to PTSD, substance abuse, or both. If you give up substances, you can keep growing emotionally.

**Isolates you.** You cannot have good relationships when high. One of the main features of PTSD is isolation: keeping secrets, having to lie about what happened, feeling alone. Substance abuse perpetuates that aloneness.

**Keeps you from coping with feelings.** It can feel unbearable to face the feelings associated with PTSD, and it may be tempting to use substances to “self-medicate” them. But true healing means learning to gain control over your feelings through safe coping. Healing *is* possible if you can give up substances that are getting in the way.

**Takes away your control.** One of the most difficult aspects of PTSD is that you had no control over the trauma. The very nature of substance abuse is that it also takes away your control—it runs your life. Take back your power by giving up substances!

**Makes you hate yourself.** You can’t feel good about yourself when you are being controlled by a substance. With PTSD, you may already dislike yourself; substance abuse just adds to that.

**Is a way of neglecting yourself.** Using substances impairs your health, your mind, your relationships, your self-worth, and your spirituality. If you suffered childhood neglect or abuse, substance abuse may be a repetition of that pattern, except that now you are doing it to yourself.

**Healing from PTSD requires all of your care and attention—substance abuse keeps you stuck.**

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