

# Signs that someone is struggling with an addiction

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While the holidays are a time to be enjoyed with family and friends, they also are a time when signs of addiction may be observed. Baylor College of Medicine's Dr. Thomas Kosten discusses the signs that families can look out for that their loved one may be struggling with an addiction, which can be exacerbated during the holidays.

"Addictions are usually thought of in terms of chemical addictions; that is, substances that people take too much of and as people take them repeatedly over time they become dependent on them," said Kosten, professor in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and director of the division of alcohol and addiction psychiatry at Baylor. "They need more and more to get the same type of effect so they are escalating their use all of the time."

The other component of dependence is withdrawal, Kosten said. When someone stops taking a [drug](#) after they have been using it every day, they can experience [withdrawal syndrome](#). Symptoms of withdrawal are associated with hyperarousal so the heart will beat faster, which may increase [blood pressure](#) and feelings of anxiousness.

"If a person is in significant withdrawal from opiates, for example, then families may notice that the person is really sick and it looks like they have a bad case of the flu. With other drugs of abuse, like sedatives, a person may actually have a seizure if they stop using them," Kosten said.

Kosten explained that another sign of addiction may be that the [family](#)

member is gone a lot because they are looking to obtain more of the drugs. It also becomes harder and harder for them to live up to the obligations they have to their spouse, child or job.

One of the most overt signs of addiction is when a person overdoses on the drug, Kosten added. He cautioned that this does mean they die of the overdose but have a serious episode.

He said one of the most important ways you can help a loved one if you think they are struggling with an addiction is to say something to them.

"If notice that your family member is not acting right, point it out and ask why. They might lie about it but you shouldn't be discouraged by that; you may not get to their heart and soul immediately," Kosten said. "There doesn't need to be a big intervention with 10 to 20 people there, all it takes is one or two people to just get the addict's attention. Also, don't be afraid to use tough love if needed."

For those in need of addiction resources in the Houston area, Kosten recommends reaching out the Council on Recovery. For those with an alcohol [addiction](#), he suggests finding out more about Alcoholics Anonymous.

"I think professional help usually makes the most sense, and you should go to someone that has some expertise in this field," he said. "Treatment also is dependent on what type of drug is being abused."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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