

Those Other Drugs: Self-assessing “Secondary” Drug Use

It is common for individuals with severe alcohol and other drug problems to define such problems in terms of a primary drug, and to define recovery in terms of abstinence from that drug. Thus it was not uncommon for early members of Alcoholics Anonymous to develop “pill problems” and for early members of Narcotics Anonymous to develop problems with alcohol or drugs other than opiates. In the years since, questions have continued on the question of licit and illicit drug use by those recovering from alcoholism and alcohol use by those recovering from drug dependence. What is clear is that such drug substitution is a high risk activity and one that is higher risk for some than others. The checklist below provides a way for individuals to assess the number of risk factors they possess that would increase the odds of developing a problem with drugs other than their primary drug. Each checkmark indicates a risk of problem development.

- There is an extensive history of alcohol problems in my family.
- There is a history of problems related to drugs other than alcohol in my family.
- I began using alcohol and/or drugs at an early age (before age 15).
- I often used my secondary drug at the same time I was using my primary drug.
- I experienced some problems with my secondary drug before developing dependence upon my primary drug.
- My secondary drug has the potential for physical dependence.
- I have a high tolerance for my secondary drug—seem to be able to use more of it than those around me.
- I use my secondary drug on a close to daily basis.
- I sometimes combine my secondary drug use with high risk activities, e.g., driving.
- I use increased quantities of my secondary drug on days I am experienced emotional distress.
- I suffer depression, anxiety, or another psychiatric illness
- In the past, I have relapsed to my primary drug while under the influence of the secondary drug.
- Prolonged use of the secondary drug has been scientifically linked to significant health problems.

___ The environments in which I use my secondary drug also contain my the drug to which I became dependent upon.

___ I experienced considerable trauma and distress as a child.

Maximum possible risk score: 15

My risk score: _____

Based on this assessment of risk factors, I think I should

1.

2.

References

White, W. (2007) Can recovering drug addicts drink? A historical footnote. *Counselor*, 8(6), 36-41.