# **Substance-Use Disorders Co-Occurring with Borderline Disorder**

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Two-thirds of people with borderline disorder seriously abuse alcohol, street drugs, and/or prescribed drugs. This is one of the most important factors resulting in poor outcome of people with borderline disorder. A common reason for abusing alcohol and drugs reported by people with borderline disorder is that such behaviors temporarily relieve the severe emotional pain that they experience, especially when under stress. Predictably, this relief is short lived. Even worse, the use of these substances markedly decreases already impaired control of emotions, impulsive behavior and reasoning ability.

It is possible that some of the genetic alterations that are risk factors in borderline disorder may also be among the group of genes that predispose people to alcoholism and drug abuse.

#### **DSM-IV-TR** Criteria for Substance Use Disorders:

There are two types of substance use disorders, substance dependence and substance abuse.

## **Substance Dependence**

A pattern of substance use that leads to significant impairment or distress in three (or more) of the following ways:

- tolerance, as defined by either
  - $\sim$  a need for markedly increased amounts of the substance to achieve the desired effect, or
  - ~ a markedly diminished effect with continued used of the same amount of the substance
- withdrawal symptoms characteristic for the substance, or increased use to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms
- the substance is taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than intended
- a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control substance use
- much time is spent in activities to obtain the substance, use the substance, or recover from its effects
- important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced
- the substance use is continued despite it causing a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem (e.g., current cocaine use despite recognition of cocaine-induced depression)

### **Substance Abuse**

A pattern of substance use that leads to significant impairment or distress in one (or more) of the following ways:

- a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home
- recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous
- recurrent substance-related legal problems
- continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or worsened by the effects of the substance

### **Consequences of Abuse of Alcohol and Street Drugs in Borderline Disorder**

- dramatic worsening of the symptoms of borderline disorder
- marked decrease in the effectiveness of medications and psychotherapy.
- addiction to and sustained craving for these substances.

### **Treatment Interventions**

For all of these reasons, I strongly advise my patients with borderline disorder to not use alcohol, to not take any street drugs, and to take prescribed medications only as ordered by their physicians. In addition, I encourage those patients who have a substance-use disorder to enroll in an alcohol or drug treatment program, including attending meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. I also suggest to some of them that they may benefit from a trial on Antabuse if they are not able to control their alcohol intake, or the antiepileptic and mood-stabilizing drug topiramate (Topamax) because of its reported potential to reduce alcohol and drug craving in addicted patients. The use of topiramate for the treatment of substance use disorders is an off-label use of the drug (not an indication approved by the Food and Drug Administration, the FDA). The potential side effects of both drugs should be discussed thoroughly with your physician.

#### **Conclusions**

- Substance use disorders are one of the strongest predictors of poor shortand long-term outcome of borderline disorder.
- There is little or no hope of gaining control over the symptoms of borderline disorder while alcohol and other drugs are being used, no matter how appropriate the treatment program is otherwise.