

What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders (CBT-SUD)?

CBT-SUD is a short-term psychotherapy (or “talk therapy”) that addresses substance use disorders and problems related to substance use. CBT-SUD focuses on the relationships among thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Your therapist will work with you to help you reach your treatment goals. CBT-SUD works well with other treatment services including support groups and medications.



COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY FOR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

For more information about CBT for Substance Use Disorders, please talk with your local VA provider.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Disseminated by
Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Central Office
Mental Health Services



COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

FOR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

What is a substance use disorder?

Substance use is a problem when it causes difficulties for the person using and the people who care about that person. Substance use disorders are common, serious conditions. Symptoms of substance use disorders include:

- Using more or using over a longer period of time than you meant to
- Really wanting to cut back or quit and not being able to
- Spending a lot of time getting a substance, using it, or recovering from using it
- Having strong cravings or urges to use
- Not following through on things at work or with friends and family, or giving up hobbies and things you used to enjoy because of use
- Using in situations that are dangerous such as driving a car or using a chainsaw
- Using even though you know it is causing, or making worse, a medical or mental health problem
- Not being able to feel buzzed or high anymore or needing to use more to feel that way
- Getting sick or feeling irritable, angry, or nervous when you stop using or cut back

What happens in a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders (CBT-SUD) session?

CBT-SUD sessions are structured by including:

- A weekly assessment of substance use
- A summary of the previous session
- A review of homework assigned during the last session
- An agenda of topics to be discussed
- Homework for the coming week

What are the goals of CBT-SUD?

In CBT-SUD you will work with your therapist to decide on treatment goals that are important to you. Your therapist will assist you in making and maintaining changes in substance use. CBT-SUD can help to improve the quality of your life and overall level of functioning.

What kinds of topics are covered in CBT-SUD?

You and your therapist will work together to determine what topics will be most useful for you. The topics that will be covered might include:

- Cravings and Urges
- Alcohol or Other Drug Refusal Skills
- Mood Management
- Social and Recreational Counseling
- Support for Sobriety
- Listening Skills
- Problem Solving

Does CBT-SUD work?

Decades of research have shown that CBT-SUD is a highly effective treatment for people with substance use disorders.

How long does it take?

CBT-SUD consists of approximately 12 individual sessions with a therapist. Each session lasts about an hour. Veterans are usually seen every week.

If you decide to participate in CBT-SUD you will be asked to:

- Attend sessions regularly
- Work together with the therapist to set therapy goals
- Practice new skills both inside and outside of session
- Provide feedback to the therapist about progress and how the therapy is helpful to you

It will be important for you to use what you learn during the therapy sessions at home.

How will I know if CBT-SUD is helping?

You may notice improved ability to manage cravings and urges. You may notice your problem solving skills have improved. You may experience increased commitment to making and maintaining changes in substance use. You may also notice that you are getting more enjoyment out of activities.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders (CBT-SUD) is an effective treatment available at many facilities in the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system.

