

[Detecting Substance Abuse and Dependence: Red Flags, and Risk Factors \[1\]](#)

Description: Lists the psychosocial and physical indications of substance abuse in general as well as the specific physical symptoms of opioid use (Source: Clinical Tools, Inc., 2004).

Symptoms, Red Flags, and Risk Factors

Implementing screening instruments is not the only way to identify drug-using patients. Red flags may be apparent during the clinical interview and physical exam. A variety of **psychosocial indicators** may point to substance abuse or dependence. Look for:

- Agitation, anxiety, anger, irritability, depression, mood swings
- Marital problems (including separation and divorce), abuse or violence, children's behavioral problems, family members' anxiety and depression
- Loss of long-standing friendships, spending time with other drug abusers, social isolation, loss of interest in regular activities
- Missing work or school, poor performance, frequent job changes or relocations
- Arrests, DUIs, theft, drug dealing
- Large recent debt, borrowing money from friends/relatives, selling possessions (presumably for drug money)

Some opioids, such as heroin, are commonly injected. Note whether your patient presents with any **physical indications of injection drug use**, such as:

- Track marks or scars
- Abscesses, cellulitis, or dermatitis present at injection sites
- Skin necrosis
- Allergic reactions
- Tourniquet pigmentation

In addition to these general indications of drug use, there are some **signs and symptoms particular to opioid use**. Note the following, indicative of prolonged opioid use, in your patients. Also be watchful for patients who are high during office visits.

- Pupillary constriction
- Dry mouth and nose
- Constipation
- Decreased libido and/or sexual dysfunction
- Irregular periods in female patients

Links:

[1] <https://www.buppractice.com/detecting-substance-abuse-dependence>
