

Quick Guide: Differentiating Aging vs. Substance-Related Symptoms

Instructions: This guide helps clinicians distinguish between symptoms related to aging and those caused by substance use.

Symptom	Potential Age-Related Cause	Possible Substance-Related Cause
Memory Loss	Normal cognitive decline, early dementia	Alcohol-related dementia, medication misuse
Fatigue	Slower metabolism, chronic conditions	Withdrawal effects, stimulant crashes
Dizziness	Blood pressure changes, dehydration	Medication side effects, substance interactions
Mood Swings	Hormonal shifts, life stressors	Opioid or benzodiazepine withdrawal, intoxication effects
Sleep Disruptions	Natural aging changes, pain, anxiety	Stimulant use, withdrawal, disrupted sleep cycles

Screening Considerations:

- Review medication interactions that may mimic substance effects.
- Assess history of substance use and recent behavioral changes.
- Use standardized screening tools designed for older adults.

Next Steps:

- If substance use is suspected, perform a comprehensive screening.
- Collaborate with medical providers to rule out health-related causes.
- Adapt treatment approaches based on age-specific care needs.