

Reducing alcohol and other drugs



FACT SHEET 9

Sometimes people use alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana and other drugs to deal with their problems and feelings. These substances can cause long-term problems. Alcohol is a depression-causing drug and any relief it provides doesn't last.

Most illegal drugs and alcohol interfere with the effects of antidepressant drugs. If you've been drinking large amounts of alcohol or taking other drugs, tell your doctor so you can get the appropriate treatment.

Your doctor can also help you to make a plan to stop smoking cigarettes. This is important as cigarette smoking has negative effects on both your physical and mental health.

CIGARETTE SMOKING

- Many people with depression or anxiety take up cigarette smoking and soon become addicted to nicotine.
- People who try to quit smoking after years of use may sometimes develop depression, anxiety or irritability in the first few weeks and often go back to smoking.
- It's important to consult your doctor if you develop depression or anxiety when you try to quit smoking.

SMOKING MARIJUANA

- Marijuana may cause depression or anxiety, even in people who have never previously shown signs of having the illness.
- There is no known 'safe' level of marijuana use.

THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF AMPHETAMINES (SPEED), ECSTASY AND OTHER ILLEGAL DRUGS

Many people use illegal drugs to deal with their depression or anxiety, but:

- The effects of these drugs may increase depression and anxiety
- High proportions of people who use amphetamines and related drugs develop depression, anxiety, panic attacks and paranoia
- Ecstasy and related drugs can cause severe mental and emotional disturbances
- Withdrawal effects of these drugs can include depression, anxiety, irritability and agitation.

RESEARCH ON SUBSTANCE-ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA TELLS US THAT:

- One in 13 Australian adults has a substance-use disorder
- Alcohol-use disorders are about three times as common as drug-use disorders
- Of the illegal drugs, marijuana accounts for more drug-use disorders than any other illegal drug
- The prevalence of substance-use disorders actually declines with age. For example, one in six Australians aged 18-24 years has a substance-use disorder compared with just one in 90 over 65 years of age
- There is little difference between rates of substance-use disorders in rural and metropolitan areas
- Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds are less likely to have a substance-use disorder.

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HOW CAN YOU REDUCE YOUR ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE?

Part of reducing your alcohol and drug use is to be aware of how much alcohol you are drinking and what drugs you are taking. Once you know this, there are some ways to help yourself, including:

1. Stopping completely. It's important to stop completely when:

- Your depression or anxiety is severe
- You've experienced physical health problems as a result of your drinking or drug use
- You've become addicted
- Your life and happiness is affected
- You're taking antidepressants.

2. Moderating or controlling your use

It's often very hard to stop drinking or taking drugs completely. Asking your family and friends for help is a good place to start. Your doctor can also develop a program to help you to change your habits. The doctor may prescribe medication if needed.

If you have developed drinking problems in association with depression or anxiety, it's important to control or moderate your drinking. Test yourself to see whether you can reduce your daily or weekly alcohol intake and try to maintain this level. Some approaches to controlling your use include:

- Not having any alcohol or drugs over a one to two-month period
- Reducing your daily intake. For example, you could reduce your drinking by two drinks a day
- Only having two drinks a day over a one to two-month period.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

- Don't drink alone.
- Don't drink when you know you're down or anxious.
- Don't keep alcohol in the house.
- Avoid situations where you know you will drink excessively (eg. bars, pubs, hotels).
- Limit drinking to meal times.
- Drink low-alcohol beers and mixers.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks.
- Don't drink during the working week.
- Have alcohol-free days, weekends or weeks.
- Count your drinks and stop at a pre-set limit eg. two to four per day
- Drink slowly – limit yourself to two drinks per hour.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn about other coping strategies for depression and anxiety

beyondblue Fact sheet 6: Reducing stress

beyondblue Fact sheet 7: Sleeping well

beyondblue Fact sheet 8: Keeping active

Learn about other treatments for depression and anxiety

beyondblue Fact sheet 10: Changing your thinking

beyondblue Fact sheet 11: Antidepressant medication

beyondblue Fact sheet 14: What other treatments are available for depression and anxiety?

NDARC

www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/ndarc.nsf T: 02 9385 0333

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) is working to increase the effectiveness of interventions for drug and alcohol problems in Australia.

Quit

www.quit.org.au (Victoria) T: 137 848 (8am to 8pm EST)

This program can help you quit smoking or help you find out more about how smoking harms you.

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PO Box 6100, Hawthorn West VIC 3122

T: (03) 9810 6100

F: (03) 9810 6111

E: bb@beyondblue.org.au

W: www.beyondblue.org.au

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www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2000.00686.x/abs/