

Understanding and addressing problem alcohol or drug use

Alcohol or non-illicit drug use becomes a problem when they are used in excess or when illicit drugs are introduced. They can cause physical or psychological harm. Some signs that alcohol or drug use has become a problem include:

- ▷ Frequent and heavy use.
- ▷ Used to avoid unpleasant situations or to cope with stress.
- ▷ Frequent cravings or thinking about use.
- ▷ Family or friends raise concerns about the use.
- ▷ Drinking or using drugs when alone / hiding use from friends or family.
- ▷ Impact on attendance/performance at work.
- ▷ Spending more time with people who drink or use drugs to excess.
- ▷ Losing interest in activities that you used to love.
- ▷ Relationship, financial or legal problems.
- ▷ Health or medical problems.
- ▷ Repeated failures to reduce the amount of alcohol or drugs consumed.
- ▷ Having blackouts and / or remorse and shame after use.

It is important to know that drugs affect people differently. A person's reaction to a drug will vary according to different factors:

- ▷ The type of drug.
- ▷ The amount and strength of the drug.
- ▷ How the drug is taken.
- ▷ Other drugs taken (the consequence of mixing drugs can be very severe).
- ▷ Body size, and family and mental health history.
- ▷ The length of drug use.

Alcohol and drug abuse has a negative impact on mental health. For example, many people may associate alcohol and drugs to assist in feeling calmer, to forget problems or cope with difficult situations. When in fact, the opposite is true. The effects are only temporary and often only make the problems worse. If you suffer from depression or anxiety, it is important to seek medical and psychological help and to reduce or stop using alcohol or drugs to manage your symptoms more effectively and speed up your recovery. ▶



In many cases it can be very difficult to “just stop” and, where there is a psychological or physical dependence, stopping use can lead to a difficult period of withdrawal. This is because after a long period of regular use, the body and brain adapts to the drug and seems only to function “normally” when the alcohol or drug is in the system.

The severity of withdrawal symptoms vary from person to person and with factors such as:

- ▷ the length of time of use,
- ▷ how much has been regularly used,
- ▷ the reason for use, and
- ▷ the person’s general health and nutrition.

It is important to get a few things in place to successfully stop, reduce or cease problem alcohol or drug use.

Consult an appropriate health or mental health care professional

Talk about your plans with your doctor and seek their advice about whether medication or other treatment might be necessary. Request an appointment with a counsellor from BSS Psychology for ongoing support and strategies to reduce use and avoid relapse.

Organise a safe environment

Before beginning your withdrawal make sure you advise a responsible person and seek a place where there are no drugs and no people who will tempt you to reuse.

Organise support

It is important to have the right people around you while you go through withdrawal. This means people who will support your effort to stop use; who will spend time with you and be there to help get you through any difficult moments. Your support list should include a good doctor and / or a suitably qualified counsellor (use your workplace EAP).

Structure your time

Plan other activities for those times when you are tempted to use the drug:

- ▷ avoiding extra stress or big changes can be challenging, reflect on how you coped in the past without alcohol or drugs, when you encountered a stressful time in your life,
- ▷ make a point of doing other things you personally find enjoyable and relaxing,
- ▷ set up good routine with regular sleep, good nutrition and exercise to help address the side effects of withdrawal.

Drink plenty of fluids

This includes water, fruit or vegetable juices.

Where to get help

- ▷ Your doctor
- ▷ Your Employee Assistance Program (BSS Psychology)
- ▷ WA Health Agencies

Alcohol: think again: 1800 198 024
www.alcoholthinkagain.com.au

Family Drug Support: 1300 368 186
www.fds.org.au

Health Direct: 1800 022 222
www.healthdirect.gov.au

Alcoholics Anonymous Australia: 1300 222 222
www.aa.org.au



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BSS Main Office: 1029 Wellington Street, West Perth WA 6005
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