

DRINKING, DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Drinking may seem like a good way to take your mind off things, particularly if you're feeling depressed or anxious, but it can affect you mentally as well as physically. Alcohol can alter or exaggerate the mood you're in – so if you are depressed or anxious, alcohol can make these feelings worse. And regular drinking can also increase your chances of developing depression.

ALCOHOL, DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Drinking can cause lots of short-term problems, including headaches, feeling sick or vomiting, feeling dizzy or passing out. Being drunk can also lead to being aggressive and getting into fights, having unsafe sex, being vulnerable to assault and rape, and self-harming on impulse.

These problems and the risks of drink-driving, like being killed or badly injured or hurting someone else, are well-known but you may not know about the links between alcohol and mental health. In many ways, alcohol and

depression go hand-in-hand. Drinking, together with problems like low self-esteem, can make you more likely to develop depression and anxiety – either as a teenager or when you are older.

As well, many young people who have depression and anxiety turn to drinking to deal with or block out the effects of these illnesses. Young men with depression are especially likely to try to feel better through drinking, rather than asking for help. Young people who are anxious in social situations may drink excessively to overcome their shyness. This can become a very unhealthy habit or long-term crutch for mixing socially.

The problem is that alcohol only gives temporary relief from depression and anxiety, and can actually make your symptoms worse. Alcohol can also interfere with any medication you might be taking for depression.

CUTTING BACK ON ALCOHOL

If you're worried that the amount of alcohol you're drinking is making your depression or anxiety worse, or that you're just drinking too much in general, here are some tips to cut back:

- try not to drink by yourself, or when you're feeling down or anxious
- don't keep alcohol at home
- try alcohol-free days, weekends or weeks
- avoid drinking during the school working week
- wait till you've finished work, homework or study before going out for a drink
- tell your friends you don't want to have more than two drinks
- leave early if you think you'll drink too much or suggest somewhere else to go with your friends (such as the movies)
- if you're worried what your friends might say, tell them you've got something on the next day and don't want a hangover
- avoid rounds (or shouts)
- switch to low alcohol beers
- alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones
- sip slowly
- keep a count of your drinks and stop at a certain number.

New Australian guidelines on reducing the health risks from alcohol say that not drinking at all is the safest option for young people under 18 years of age, and that young people up to the age of 25 should also take care with alcohol. This is because young people are more likely than adults to come to harm from drinking, and drinking can also lead to brain damage and problems with alcohol later in life.

Visit: www.youthbeyondblue.com

Info line: **1300 22 4636**

beyondblue: the national depression initiative



ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Young people who drink to deal with depression and anxiety may also take other drugs that affect the mind, such as cannabis or ecstasy – but combining alcohol and other drugs is even more risky than alcohol alone. All drugs have different effects on your body, and these effects interact in ways that are hard to predict. This can be harmful and perhaps even fatal.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Whether you have depression or not, it's a good idea to keep a check on how much you drink, how often and why.
- Drinking to stop you feeling depressed or anxious doesn't work and can make things worse. It can also make you less likely to do helpful things like exercising, or seeking the help you need through a GP or other health professional.
- Test if you can decrease the amount of alcohol you're drinking, and whether you can keep up this lower level of daily or weekly use. For example, if you're drinking lots or often, see if you can cut back to one or two drinks a day. There are tips on this fact sheet to help you with this.

KNOWING WHEN DRINKING IS A PROBLEM

For most people, if you drink within the recommended, sensible limits for drinking, that's okay. But for some people, drinking gradually gets out of control and results either in regular heavy drinking or alcohol dependence.

Some signs that you may have a problem with your drinking are feeling edgy and hungover in the mornings, and finding it difficult to concentrate on study or work. You may think about drinking a lot during the day. You may find that you need to drink more to get the same effect, and also keep drinking even when you don't really want to. Your drinking may have started to cause problems for you such as fights, driving offences, relationship problems and criticism from family or friends.

DOING WITHOUT

Sometimes it's necessary for health reasons to stop drinking completely. This is usually the case when your depression or anxiety is severe, you're having other physical health problems or you've become dependent on alcohol. You may also need to stop drinking if you're having serious social or personal problems because of your alcohol use.

Even if this isn't the case for you, it might be a good idea to test whether or not you can stop drinking completely for some time (such as one or two months). If you're used to drinking regularly, stopping completely can be really hard. It's a good idea to let your family and friends know what you're trying to do and get their support.



WHERE TO GET HELP

If you, or your friends or family members, think your drinking is a problem, then take it seriously and talk about it. It's not always easy to change your drinking patterns, but other people can help. Try talking to a trusted family member, friend, doctor or counsellor. Talk about and address

your other problems – as well as your drinking, particularly if you have anxiety or depression. There are organisations that can help you. You could start by phoning the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in your state. Or you can get more information on the net – try the Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) or Somazone.



LOOK

for the signs of depression



TALK

about what's going on



LISTEN

to your friends' experiences



SEEK HELP

together!

State-based Alcohol and Drug Information Services:

ACT	(02) 6207 9977	SA	1300 131 340 or (08) 8363 8618
QLD	1800 177 833	VIC	1800 888 236
NSW	1800 422 599 or (02) 9361 8000	TAS	1800 811 994
NT	1800 131 350	WA	1800 198 024 or (08) 9442 5000

MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

You can speak to trained counsellors by phoning these 24-hour telephone counselling services:

Lifeline 13 11 14 (cost of a local call)

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800 (freecall)

Information and support is also available from the following websites:

beyondblue www.youthbeyondblue.com or www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and how to help a friend

headspace www.headspace.org.au
Information, support and help near you

ReachOut.com www.reachout.com
Information and support for young people going through tough times

National LGBT Health Alliance

www.lgbthealth.org.au Information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexuality, sex and gender diverse people (LGBT)

The websites below can help you to find health services in your area. They list services that are either free of charge or low cost:

Kids Help Line www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline Service Finder
www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder

If you or a friend want to communicate with someone via email or online, Kids Help Line offers confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

SOURCES

This fact sheet is based on the following sources:
 ■ **beyondblue** www.youthbeyondblue.com **beyondblue** (2005) National Youth Depression and Alcohol Review. Prepared for the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing by **beyondblue: the national depression initiative**. ■ Great Ormond Street Hospital, London www.childrenfirst.nhs.uk ■ **headspace** (National Youth Mental Health Foundation) www.headspace.org.au ■ National Health and Medical Research Council (2009) Australian Alcohol Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol www.nhmrc.gov.au ■ **ReachOut.com** www.reachout.com

Visit: www.youthbeyondblue.com

Info line: **1300 22 4636**

beyondblue: the national depression initiative

