

# REDUCING ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS



- Many people treat their mood problems with alcohol, tobacco smoking, cannabis and other drugs.
- Although these substances provide temporary relief they cause long-term problems.
- Alcohol is a depression-causing drug. Any relief it provides does not last.
- Most illegal drugs and alcohol interfere with the effects of antidepressant drugs. If you have been consuming large amounts of alcohol or other drugs, tell your doctor so that an appropriate treatment plan can be worked out.
- Cigarette smoking is bad for your physical and psychological health. You may require medical assistance to stop smoking.

## SUBSTANCE-USE DISORDERS—THE AUSTRALIAN PICTURE

From the **National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2000)**:

(<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2000.00686.x/abs/>)

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

## TOBACCO SMOKING

- Many young people with depression or anxiety take up cigarette smoking and soon become addicted to nicotine.
- Many people who try and quit smoking after years of use develop severe depression, anxiety or irritability in the first few weeks and quickly go back to smoking.
- If you do develop depression or anxiety when you try to quit smoking, consult your doctor.

## HARMFUL USE OF CANNABIS

- Research now indicates that cannabis may cause depression or anxiety even in those young people who have never previously had these symptoms.
- There is no known 'safe' level of cannabis use. It should not be considered as a 'recreational' drug.

## MORE INFORMATION

NDARC [<http://www.med.unsw.edu.au/ndarc>]

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) strives to contribute towards an increase in the effectiveness of interventions for drug and alcohol problems in Australia.

Quit [<http://www.quit.org.au/>]

Quit is a program housed within The Cancer Council Victoria. The program can help you quit smoking or help you find out more about how smoking harms you.

'Cannabis use and mental health in young people: a cohort study' - *British Medical Journal* (2002)

[<http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/reprint/325/7374/1195.pdf>]

Patton and colleagues have examined the link between cannabis use in young people and the development of depression and anxiety in later-life. This study finds that smoking cannabis weekly or more often significantly increased the risk of later depression and anxiety, especially in girls. Download the article to learn more.

Source: Hickie et al. Educational Health Solutions; 2000. Reproduced with permission [<http://www.spheregp.com.au>]

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## HARMFUL USE OF AMPHETAMINES, ECSTASY, AND OTHER ILLEGAL DRUGS

- Many young people with depression or anxiety use illegal drugs to control their symptoms.
- The effects of these drugs can actually increase rates of depression and anxiety.
- High proportions of users of amphetamines and related drugs demonstrate symptoms such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and paranoia.
- Ecstasy and related drugs in the long term can cause severe mental and emotional disturbances. Withdrawal effects of these drugs can include depression, anxiety, irritability and agitation.

## BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES FOR SUBSTANCE-USE DISORDERS

- Goals of behavioural strategies include:
  - Ceasing alcohol or other drugs completely; or,
  - Moderated or controlled use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Ceasing alcohol or other drugs should be the aim when:
  - Depression or anxiety is severe;
  - Physical health consequences have occurred;
  - You have become physically or psychologically dependent;
  - There are significant social or personal consequences; and,
  - You are receiving antidepressant drug treatment.
- Abstinence is very hard to achieve for many problem drinkers. You will certainly require assistance from family and friends and may well need to undertake a program supervised by your doctor. At times, medications may need to be used to cover the withdrawal period (eg. diazepam) or to help you stay sober (eg. acamprosate).
- Controlled or moderated drinking should be the aim for most people who have developed drinking problems in association with psychological problems.
- The first task is to test whether you can reduce your alcohol intake and maintain your drinking at a much lower level of daily or weekly intake.
- You will need to monitor your drinking pattern closely with this approach.
- Possible strategies include:
  - A trial of abstinence (eg. one to two months);
  - An agreed program of reduction (eg. to reduce by two drinks per day); and,
  - A trial period of reduced drinking (eg. only two drinks per day for one to two months).
- Other helpful strategies for controlled or moderate drinking include:
  - Don't ever 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, hotels);
  - Limit drinking to meal times;
  - Drink low alcohol beers and mixes;
  - Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks;
  - Don't drink during the working week;
  - Have alcohol-free days, weekends or weeks!
  - Keep a count of your drinks and stop at a pre-set limit (eg. two to four per session); and,
  - Drink slowly (limit yourself to two drinks per hour).

### MORE INFORMATION

#### Learn about other coping strategies for depression and anxiety:

[beyondblue fact sheet - Stress and anxiety reduction strategies](#)

[beyondblue fact sheet - Sleep-wake cycle management](#)

[beyondblue fact sheet - Physical activity management](#)

#### Learn about other treatments for depression and anxiety:

[beyondblue fact sheet - Cognitive and other psychological therapies](#)

[beyondblue fact sheet - Why do I need to take antidepressant drugs?](#)

[beyondblue fact sheet - Alternative treatments](#)

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