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Changing Unhelpful Behaviour (2) – Alcohol & Drugs

Alcohol & drug use

Alcohol and street drugs are widely used socially — for fun, for relaxation and for enjoyment. However they can both be misused and street drugs are illegal.



Surveys show that many people develop drink problems. People may start drinking to fit in with the crowd, enjoy the impact of drink, or to block out uncomfortable feelings. However, when alcohol is taken at a high level for weeks or months it can affect our mood, our bodies and our relationships.

People use street drugs for similar reasons to alcohol. A wide range of street drugs exists and, whilst the effects of different drugs vary, there are some general effects that they and alcohol can all have.

Recording what you drink & what drugs you use
Everybody is different. Whether you are drinking or taking street drugs, a good first step is to record how much you use. Most people underestimate how much they take. Talk to your guide about how much alcohol or street drugs you are using. Only you know whether this is a problem for you, but your guide may offer you information about your drinking or drug use that you didn't know and that may help you decide if alcohol or drug use is a problem for you. It may help you and your guide if you keep a simple diary for a week or two of how much alcohol or street drugs you use.

Alcohol and drugs when taken at high levels — or regularly at low levels — can cause a range of problems. People often drink or use drugs to improve how they feel, but actually they can cause low mood and prevent recovery from depression and anxiety, or make them worse if they are already present.

If you are drinking or using drugs in ways that damage you, unless you can reduce the amount you take, you are likely to cause yourself increasing problems. You need to tackle your problem now. You may be tempted to downplay or ignore things and believe it is not a problem, but ignoring things is often part of the problem. Think about your own drinking or drug use. What impact does this have on you and those around you in the short and longer-term? Is it affecting your physical health, or your mental health, or your social life and relationships? Are you using alcohol or drugs as a way of blotting out your distress instead of making the changes that could help you come to terms with it?

If you are drinking or using street drugs at a high level: If you stop drinking or taking the drugs too quickly, it is possible you will notice some symptoms of withdrawal. This may be the reason why so many people fail to tackle their problems. However it is possible to make changes — and in fact it is even more important to do so if you are taking drink / drugs at these higher levels.

To make successful changes you need to cut down the amount taken in a slow step-by-step manner. Your guide will help and support you, but he / she cannot make the changes for you — that has to be your choice.

Finally, if you find that you are struggling with self-help and that your drug or alcohol use is getting worse then talk to someone who can help — your guide, your GP or health care worker for example — who can put you in touch with the best service for you. Your guide can take you through a short questionnaire (the AUDIT) to help you decide if alcohol is a problem for you.

