

Changing What You Do - Alcohol & Drugs

Some people use alcohol and street drugs socially – for fun, for relaxation and for enjoyment. Both alcohol and drugs can be misused, and street drugs are illegal.

Surveys show that many people develop drink problems.

People may start drinking for different reasons:

- Enjoy the impact of drink
- To fit in with the crowd,
- To block out uncomfortable feelings.

Taking high amounts of alcohol over a long time can affect our mood, our bodies and our relationships. People use street drugs for similar reasons to alcohol. A wide range of street drugs exist and there are many bad effects that they and alcohol can have.

Recording what you drink and 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. Your guide may tell you things about your drinking or drug use that you didn't know. 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. If you like, your guide can give you a Daily Diary (leaflet 17) to help you see how your drug or alcohol use affects your moods, your thoughts, your physical health and other people.

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 moods 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 problems and these problems will get worse. You need to tackle your problem now. You may be tempted to ignore things, thinking it is not a problem, but ignoring things is often part of the problem.

Think about your 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?

Adapted with permission from 'Overcoming Depression and Low Mood: A Five Areas Approach' by Dr Chris Williams (Hodder-Arnold Press)

Changing What You Do – Alcohol & Drugs

Continued...

If you are drinking or using street drugs at a high level, don't stop drinking or taking drugs too quickly, you might get withdrawal effects which might put you off doing something about the problem. It is possible to make changes, but 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 or she cannot make the changes for you – that has to be your choice.

Finally, if you find self-help is not working 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.

Adapted with permission from 'Overcoming Depression and Low Mood: A Five Areas Approach' by Dr Chris Williams (Hodder-Arnold Press)

FOR MORE LEAFLETS IN THIS SERIES GO TO www.primarycare-selfhelp.co.uk