

Substance misuse – alcohol & other drugs

The misuse of alcohol and other drugs can have a damaging effect on the brain. It is important to get support if you need help to manage a substance use issue.

What is substance misuse? Substance misuse is the inappropriate or excessive use of substances — alcohol and other drugs. This includes the misuse of illegal substances, such as cannabis, ice and amphetamines, and legal substances, such as alcohol, prescription medications, and nicotine.

Why do people misuse alcohol and other drugs?

People use alcohol and other drugs for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons include to relax, have fun, dull emotional or physical pain, or to escape from problems or difficulties experienced in life. The misuse of substances can lead to a dependence on the substance to cope in certain situations and may prevent you from learning to use healthy effective coping strategies. The use of substances to escape emotional pain or to avoid dealing with issues may be effective in the short term however the long-term impact on your health and wellbeing has serious consequences. Some substances are highly addictive eliciting a physical and psychological dependence on the substance following regular continued use. People with lower levels of self-control, or an impairment of the brain inhibitory mechanisms, are more likely to develop a substance use disorder.

Signs of substance misuse or addition:

- neglecting responsibilities and becoming disengaged from activities you previously enjoyed, including work, family, hobbies, sport and spending time with friends Ready to help 24/7. 13 11 14
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- participating in dangerous or risky behaviours — drink driving, unprotected sex, using dirty needles
- criminal behaviour — stealing, purchase and use of illegal substances, causing physical harm to self or others
- relationship problems — difficulty maintaining relationships, conflict with partner, family or friends, loss

of friendships, family or relationship breakdown

- physical symptoms — developing a tolerance to the substance and increased usage to experience the same effects; withdrawal symptoms when not using the substance
- mental illness — substance use may cause a person to experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, paranoia or psychosis and may trigger an underlying mental disorder
- inability to control use of the substance — being unable reduce or stop using the substance

- substance use has significantly taken over your life and impaired your ability to function.

Risks of misusing alcohol and other drugs:

Legal and illegal drugs such as cannabis, ice and cocaine can be misused leading to accidental overdose or death. Misuse of alcohol and other drugs may be to manage or mask the effects of an underlying mental illness which may go untreated. Drug use is a risk factor for suicidality. People under the influence of alcohol or other drugs have impaired judgement, loss of normal inhibition and may act impulsively.

What if a person doesn't want help?

- Give the person information such as websites, so that they can read about the dangers of alcohol and drug use in their own time. They can also take an online alcohol/drug usage 'test'
- Let them know that you care for them, and are concerned about their wellbeing
- Set boundaries for inappropriate behaviour, e.g. aggression, alcohol/drug use in the home.
- Avoid nagging them to get help
- Ensure they know where to get help should they want to talk about their alcohol/drug use

- See someone yourself e.g. GP, counsellor, psychologist. They can give you tips on how best to support the person, and how to look after yourself Ready to help 24/7.

For 24-hour telephone crisis support call 13 11 14. For more information visit www.lifeline.org.au

Where to go to for support?

- Phone Lifeline on 13 11 14 (available 24/7) or chat to a Crisis Supporter online at lifeline.org.au (7pm – midnight every night)
- National Cannabis Information and Helpline 1800 30 40 50 (11am–7pm Mon to Fri) or visit www.ncpic.org.au
- Alcoholics Anonymous Australia 1300 222 222 or visit www.aa.org.au
- Narcotics Anonymous Australia 1300 652 820 or visit www.na.org.au
- Quitline: 13 78 48 or visit www.quitnow.gov.au
- Mensline Australia: 1300 78 99 78 (24hrs)
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
- eheadspace (Age 12–25): www.eheadspace.org.au

For local services and centres in your area, visit the Lifeline Service Finder Directory at www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/service-finder It is important to identify when your use of alcohol or other drugs becomes a problem and seek help.