

## ALCOHOL USE

Alcoholism is the dependent relationship of a person to alcohol in expectation of a rewarding experience. Psychological, cultural, religious and social factors influence how people use alcohol and the likelihood that alcohol problems can develop in that person's life.

Alcohol dependence and misuse is different for each person in terms of the duration and pattern of alcohol use, the order of the appearance of symptoms, the extent of physical addiction and complications. Drinking may be a part of student social life and in some situations it cannot be avoided.

What is important is that each person recognises how alcohol affects them and takes responsibility for this.

### **What is alcohol?**

- Alcohol is a chemical substance made of sugar .
- Every drink has different amounts of alcohol in it, and is measured in units. You can easily see how many units are in a drink from reading the bottle or can containing alcohol.
- Alcohol also has calories, and you are at risk of putting on weight if you drink to excess.
- Alcohol goes into your blood and affects what you do and how you see things. Getting fresh air, drinking coffee or taking a cold shower will not help your body get rid of alcohol.

### **Why do I drink?**

There are many reasons why people drink, these include:

- Your friends drink
- It helps you relax or have fun
- It helps you sleep
- It helps you relax when out socialising
- You are bored
- You get nervous if you don't drink
- You feel low or depressed
- You like the feeling of being drunk

## **There are also reasons why people stop drinking alcohol or drink less.**

Things like:

- Saving money
- Losing weight
- Better sleep
- Healthier
- Having more time to spend on other activities

## **When does alcohol become a problem?**

The development of alcohol dependence can be triggered by excessive use of alcohol in the face of stress and personal adversity. On the extreme end of alcohol abuse, a person uses alcohol to survive and feel normal rather than to feel exhilarated.

There are also Social Drinkers and Habitual Drinkers. Social Drinkers consider drinking a pleasurable experience with others. The key aspects of this pattern of alcohol use are choice and balance. Their desired end state is relaxation, and feeling more at ease. These drinkers usually avoid alcohol when faced with stress or situations where they are required to be at their best. Habitual Drinkers are alcohol abusers. They use it to get instant relaxation and relief but do not use it to see a massive change in their emotions or personality change. While they are heavy drinkers they would not always be described as alcohol dependent.

## **Symptoms of alcohol dependence**

- **Increased Tolerance** The person will have a constant need for an increased amount of alcohol to achieve the desired effect.
- **Having Regular Blackouts** Temporary memory loss coincides with alcohol use where the person has been able to function but cannot remember details of behaviour and this happens on a regular basis.
- **Euphoric Recall** This is a feeling triggered by initial feelings of relaxation when drinking alcohol. This promotes denial in a dependent drinker as drinking is associated with relaxation and fun despite negative consequences.
- **Mental Obsession** The person develops anticipation for and preoccupation with alcohol and their lifestyle changes to revolve around alcohol.
- **Loss of Choice** Elevated tolerance combined with mental obsession can lead to complete loss of choice. The person experiences loss of control over their drinking and cannot determine their behaviour under the influence. These symptoms lead to growing delusions, or the person becoming out of touch with reality. They account for the person's distorted perception, impaired judgement and inability to recognise the addiction.

Additional signs of alcohol misuse are absences from work, lying, mood swings, poor coordination, not taking care of their physical appearance, being aggressive, getting into trouble with the law (e.g. fighting, disorderly conduct), and problems with attention or short term memory.

## How can I control my drinking?

The way you drink alcohol is a habit, and it is important to identify and break this habit. You could try using a diary to note your drinking.

- Use a diary to plan when you will have a drink and how much you will have
- Make a note about when you think it may be hard for you to control drinking (e.g. student nights out)
  - Pick a couple of days you won't drink
  - Write down what you plan on drinking in advance.
  - Keep track of how much you drink on a night out Make small changes:
  - Eat food before you drink – if you feel full you may drink less
  - Have a mixer with your drink, or have smaller drinks like a small glass of wine.
  - Try other activities instead of drinking like exercising or going to the cinema and incorporate them into your routine.

## If someone close to you has an alcoholic problem

1. Try not to feel personally responsible for their alcohol consumption. Allow them to take responsibility for their own actions.
2. You can be an influence in the life of the person with the problem. It is important to not try to control all aspects of their life, rather try to regain influence.
3. Do not fuel the addiction through trying to be loyal to the dependent person. Through taking care of yourself and being true to yourself you can work towards getting them help. Do not hide the problem from family and friends by thinking you are being loyal to the dependent person, especially if you value their support.
4. Ensure you are emotionally supported yourself.

If you feel you need help with a problem with alcohol come see the [Student Experience Team](#).

Also you can log onto [drugs.ie](https://www.drugs.ie) for more information.

The [HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline](#) is a Freephone service (**1800 459 459**) which provides support, information, guidance and referral to anyone with a question or concern related to drug and alcohol use.