

Factsheet: Alcohol and mental health

drinkaware
change starts with you

It might surprise you to know that alcohol is a depressant and it can have a negative impact on your mental health.

Regular, heavy drinking interferes with chemicals in the brain that are vital for good mental health. You may initially feel relaxed after a drink but in the long run alcohol can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety and make stress harder to deal with.

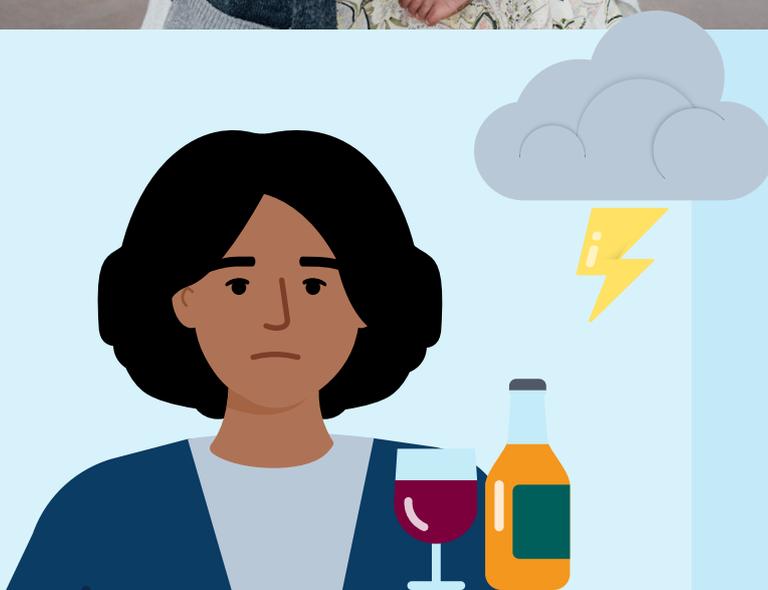
Alcohol and anxiety

For someone experiencing anxiety, a drink might help them feel more at ease due to the chemical changes alcohol causes in the brain but the effect wears off fast. Relying on alcohol to mask anxiety could also lead to a greater reliance on it to relax. A likely side-effect of this is building up a tolerance to alcohol. Over time you may need to drink more alcohol to get the same feeling. And, in the medium to longer term, this pattern can lead to alcohol dependence.

Feelings of anxiety can also worsen with a hangover if anxiety is already an issue.

Drinking and depression

Drinking heavily and regularly is associated with symptoms of depression. Alcohol affects several nerve-chemical systems within our bodies which are important in regulating our mood. Studies show that depression can follow on from heavy drinking. Drinking can also disrupt sleep patterns and a lack of good quality sleep is linked to depression and anxiety.





Alcohol, suicide, self-harm and psychosis

Alcohol can cause people to lose their inhibitions and behave impulsively, so it can lead to actions they might not otherwise have taken – including self-harm and even suicide. There is a strong association between drinking heavily and suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and death from suicide.

Extreme levels of drinking (such as drinking more than 30 units per day for several weeks) can occasionally cause psychosis, which is a severe mental illness where hallucinations and delusions occur. Psychosis can be caused by both acute intoxication and withdrawal and can be more common in cases when drinkers who are dependent on alcohol suddenly stop drinking.

If you're experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide, Samaritans provide confidential, non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day.

You can call them on **116 123** or email them at jo@samaritans.org.

Staying in control

If you choose to drink, to keep health risks from alcohol low, it is safest for both men and women to drink **no more than 14 units a week**, spread over three or more days with several drink-free days, and no bingeing. If you're not sure what 14 units looks like – that's six pints of average strength beer or six medium (175ml) glasses of average strength wine.



6 pints of beer (568ml/4%)



6 glasses of wine (175ml/13%)

When you're ready to drink less, Drinkaware is ready for you. For more information, advice and tools to help you reduce your drinking, search Drinkaware.

Change starts with you.

References: www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/mental-health/alcohol-and-mental-health

