



EMPLOYEE SERIES

Tips for managing your drug and alcohol intake

Substance misuse is the harmful use of drugs or alcohol for non-medical purposes. Often associated with the use of illicit drugs, legal substances can also be misused, such as alcohol, prescription or over-the-counter medication, caffeine, nicotine and volatile substances (e.g. petrol, glue, paint). People use drugs and alcohol for many reasons – to relax, have fun, socialise, cope with problems, escape life or dull emotional/physical pain. Becoming dependent on drugs in order to cope, rather than getting help or finding positive solutions, can create longer term problems. Some substances are more highly addictive than others and some people are more likely to become addicted to a substance depending on mental, physical and lifestyle factors.



Recognise when your substance use has become a problem. Realising and accepting that you are abusing or addicted to substances is the first step to finding help. The first step in quitting drugs is to admit that you have a problem. If you're not sure, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you taking drugs first thing in the morning or to get through the day?
- Do friends or family worry or complain about your drug use?
- Do you lie about how much you're using?
- Have you sold possessions or stolen to pay for your drug habit?
- Have you participated in dangerous or risky activities, such as driving under the influence, having unprotected sex, or using dirty needles?
- Do you feel that you've lost control of your drug taking?
- Are you having problems with work/relationships?

If you answered yes to any of these questions it might be time to accept that you have a problem and ask for help. It takes courage for someone to admit they may have a problem with drugs or alcohol but recognising you might have an issue and asking for help is an important first step to making a change.



Investigate options for help to manage and treat substance misuse and addiction. You might need to try a number of options before you find what works for you such as counselling, medication, rehabilitation centres, self-help programs or support networks. Treatment options range from counselling through to hospital care — it depends on which drugs are involved and how serious your dependence or addiction is. It's important to keep trying and never give up. Just as drugs affect each person differently, treatment needs to be individual. They include:

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- **Going cold turkey** — you stop taking drugs suddenly, with no outside help or support. This option is to be considered carefully and medical advice sought to minimise the negative physical/mental impacts of this choice.
- **Counselling and lifestyle changes** — individual or group therapy can help you learn to cope without drugs. This can be successful if your drug use has been mild. Peer support groups are often run by recovered addicts — their personal experience can be helpful to others
- **Detoxification (detox)** — you stop taking drugs and have medical treatment (known as pharmacotherapy) while your body clears the drug from your system
- **Rehabilitation (rehab)** — this is a longer-term treatment where you stay in a hospital or clinic, or at home



Get support. Getting through this on your own can be difficult. Talk to friends, family, your doctor, other health professionals or a telephone helpline about your substance use. It is important to talk to your specialist alcohol and other drugs (AOD) service or doctor about reducing or quitting drugs. They can help you get appropriate help and support. For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drug treatment services, you can call the Alcohol and Other Drug hotline on 1800 250 015. It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in your state and territory. These local alcohol and other drug telephone services offer support, information, counselling and referral to services. You can also visit a specialist alcohol and other drugs service or doctor directly.



Find alternative coping strategies. If you are using substances to cope with life or escape personal problems, find other ways to manage the situation and deal with life's stress and pressures. By dealing with other problems in your life you can make it easier to recover and not relapse. If you experience mental health issues your treatment will need to address that at the same time for your overall treatment to be effective. Other coping strategies include:

- **Practice active distraction techniques.** Our brain has a wonderful capacity to steer us in directions sometimes unknown. Establish a well structure distraction plan that you can adopt in those times when control appears to be lost.
- **Plan ahead.** Let go of old habits and embrace new skills especially around social connectivity and environments that could test your resolve to change.
- **Practice mindfulness techniques and ways to relax.** Often drug and alcohol use is embedded in a need and wish to relax and stop the chaotic headspace. There are ways and means to do this in a healthy and rejuvenating manner.
- **Stay healthy. Have fun and enjoy life.** Change is possible. Your ability to shift practices that no longer serve you is real.

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Deal with setbacks and keep going. Recovery can be a long and difficult road. Expect some setbacks and don't focus on failures, focus on your plan and understand your triggers and how to best respond to them in future. Keeping track of your drug use can help you identify habits, emotions, and social situations that trigger the desire to take drugs. Additionally:

- **Be aware of cravings.** We all have triggers that will create a wave of craving that can be hard to control. Awareness of these cravings and carefully thought out management techniques will help your resiliency and recovery process.
- **Be aware of boredom.** One of the great hurdles for those aiming to change drug and alcohol behaviours is the onset of boredom. Identify your potential for boredom and have practices ready to keep yourself busy. This could be your greatest challenge.
- **Be aware of peer pressure.** Don't be afraid to say no to others who may encourage you to use. Personal choice is okay and embedded in respect.
- **Avoid places** where you know drugs will be available.
- **Surround yourself** with friends who do not use drugs.



Reducing or quitting drugs can improve your life in many ways. It can:

- Improve your physical and mental wellbeing
- Reduce your risk of permanent damage to vital organs and death
- Improve your relationships with friends and family
- Help you reconnect with your emotions
- Increase your energy
- Help you sleep better
- Improve your appearance
- Save you money



There are many support services available to help you. You can:

- Call the National Alcohol and Other Drugs Hotline
- Visit Counselling Online and email or chat to a counsellor
- Find help and support services on the Alcohol and Drug Foundation website
- Join a support group, such as Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous
- Find a support service in our list of contacts

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Further Support

- **The Australian National Alcohol and Other Drug hotline** provides free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs. Call 1800 250 015 and you will automatically be directed to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in your state or territory.
- **The Australian National Relay Service (NRS)** is available to help callers with a hearing or speech impairment. For:
 - TTY users, call 133 677, then ask for 1300 85 85 84
 - Speak and Listen users, call 1300 555 727 then ask for 1300 85 85 84
 - Internet relay users, connect to the National Relay Service then ask for 1300 85 85 84.
- **The Australian Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)** is available (24 hours, 7 days) for callers who speak other languages. Call 131 450.
- **The New Zealand Alcohol Drug Helpline** provides a free, confidential advice. Trained staff will ask you about the substances you use, your concerns and desires for change. They will suggest which treatment services may be helpful, and can arrange an appointment with a specialist treatment service provider.
 - **General helpline** – phone 0800 787 797, text 8681
 - **Māori Helpline** – kaupapa Māori support services: phone 0800 787 798, text 8681
 - **Pasifika Helpline** – Pacific support services: phone 0800 787 799, text 8681
 - **Youth Helpline** – support for issues affecting young people: phone 0800 787 984, text 8681
- **New Zealand Relay** is available to help callers with a hearing or speech impairment. They can be contacted on:
 - **TTY:** 0800 4 713 713
 - **Voice:** 0800 4 715 715
 - **Fax:** 0800 4 329 697
 - **Help Desk email:** helpdesk@nzrelay.co.nz

References:

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/topics/substance-abuse-and-addiction>

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/drugs/about-drugs/how-to-reduce-or-quit-drugs>

<https://adf.org.au/resources/druginfo/>

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