

Drug and Alcohol Problems



What You Should Know

After a disaster, some people increase their use of alcohol or other substances. While there is nothing wrong with responsible drinking, increased use of alcohol or drugs could lead to problems. Some use substances to avoid thinking about what happened or to dull feelings of anxiety, sadness, guilt, or anger. While using drugs and alcohol can help you escape in the short run, they can make things worse in the long run. For those who use alcohol or drugs for sleep problems, these substances may seem to help; however, they can interfere with the body's ability to sleep naturally and create more sleep problems. For many reasons, people turn to alcohol or substances to try to reduce negative reactions, but the long-term effect is most often negative.

What Can Help

- **Pay close attention to any change in your use of alcohol and/or drugs.** Write down the amount and frequency of your usage to determine the extent of any problem.
- **Use all prescription and over-the-counter medications as indicated.** Ask your doctor about the medications you are using, their effects, and how they interact.
- **Take care of yourself.** By eating healthy foods, exercising, drinking plenty of water, and getting enough sleep, you will gain strength to refrain from unhealthy habits.
- **Practice ways to manage reactions.** If anxiety is a trigger for drinking or taking drugs, try slow breathing, writing down feelings and thoughts, meditation, exercise, yoga, prayer, quiet music, or spending time outdoors. These calming strategies can improve your mood and reduce your anxiety. Make a plan for handling stressful situations that trigger your use of alcohol/substances.
- **Practice helpful thinking.** Check out your thoughts. If negative and unhelpful, they may cause feelings that lead to drinking or using drugs. Plan how you can substitute helpful thoughts. For example, if you think, "I can't calm down without alcohol," try replacing it with "This feeling won't last forever," or "I can do this one day at a time."
- **Spend time with supportive others.** Spending time with friends and family who support your recovery can help you feel better, take your mind off cravings, remind you that you want to be healthy, and provide positive activities that don't involve alcohol or drugs.
- **Make use of community resources.** There are resources for alcohol and drug problems in most communities, many of them free, such as AA or Rational Recovery.
- **Talk with a doctor or counselor.** If you believe that you have a serious problem with substances, talk to a counselor or doctor about it. If appropriate, he/she may be able to help you find substance abuse treatment.