



the facts:
mental health challenges



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

alcohol

A lot of people don't see alcohol as a drug, but it's the most used and easily accessible drug in Australia.



Alcohol is a depressant which means that it slows down the brain – it dulls the senses and affects the way you think, feel and act.

Alcohol and peer pressure

It's normal to want to be part of a group and often drinking can be a big part of socialising. But if you don't want to drink, or have 'just one more', then that choice is yours. Deciding to drink alcohol should be on your terms.

If you choose to drink, it's important to get informed and drink as safely as possible.

It is important to remember that there is no safe way to use alcohol and it can impact on your developing brain and body.



What does alcohol do?

As a general rule, alcohol can make you feel more confident and relaxed, slow down your reflexes and affect your balance and coordination.

Drinking too much can cause headaches, dizziness, nausea and vomiting. In some cases, people can pass out and may not remember what happened. They may do risky things that they wouldn't do while sober.

How alcohol makes you feel depends on lots of things, like:

- your weight
- your health
- how regularly you drink
- how much you drink
- the strength of the drink
- what kind of mood you're in
- who you're drinking with.

The effects of alcohol can last for hours, even overnight, especially if you have drunk a lot. When it wears off you may feel tired, thirsty, headachy and sick. This usually won't last longer than a day.



Alcohol and mental health

Alcohol can have a big impact on our mental health. It's a depressant, so it slows your body down and changes the chemical makeup in your brain.

For example, it can change your:

- mood
- energy levels
- sleeping patterns
- concentration
- memory.

Alcohol can also reduce inhibitions and impact on decision making. This can lead us to making decisions that we wouldn't normally make while sober.

It's also linked with:

- increased risk-taking
- increased aggression
- unsafe sex practices
- self harm and suicide in people who may already be going through a tough time
- binge drinking (drinking a lot in one session).

People who are experiencing a mental health difficulty may use alcohol to try and manage tough times or lift their mood. This might feel helpful in the short term however it can end up making us feel worse, and make things harder in the long run.

Alcohol and physical health

Alcohol can impact on your physical health in a number of ways.

Short term effects include:

- difficulty sleeping
- lower immunity
- trouble concentrating
- difficulty getting motivated.

Long term alcohol use can cause additional problems like:

- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- brain damage
- liver disease as well as different kinds of cancers.



If you're pregnant, drinking alcohol can lead to serious health problems for you and your baby.

Staying safer

If you're going to drink alcohol, safer tips for you and your friends include:

- setting a limit and sticking to it (there are apps that can help you)
- pre-arranging how you'll get home
- avoiding drinking alone
- eating before and while you're drinking
- pacing yourself – drink water between alcoholic drinks
- avoiding rounds/shouts
- avoiding mixing alcohol with other drugs (prescription or illegal)
- looking out for each other; don't leave anyone alone.



Drink spiking: stay safe by always keeping an eye on your drink and not accepting any pre-opened drinks.

Benefits to reducing or stopping

There are many benefits that can come from reducing or stopping alcohol use. These may include:

- more energy
- better sleep
- saving money
- better physical health
- improved mood
- improved engagement with work and study
- improved relationships.



Getting support

It can be tricky giving up drinking if you've been doing it for a long time and are dependent because your body has to get used to going without it. You might experience withdrawal symptoms including sweating, feeling sick, anxiety, irritability, problems sleeping, hallucinations, tremors and even seizures. Because of this, it's a good idea to speak to a GP to discuss the safest way to cut back on your drinking.

For further information on cutting back on alcohol, or for safer partying tips, please see our website.

If you're worried about your alcohol use, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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