

Alcohol

Alcohol is one of the oldest and the most widely used drugs in the world. Most of us use it for enjoyment, but sometimes drinking alcohol can be a problem. Some people drink alcohol because they believe it can alter their mood and feelings or help them cope with situations or emotions they find difficult.

However, alcohol is a depressant drug. It affects how the brain works, slowing down the central nervous system and can increase levels of anxiety or make symptoms of depression worse.

It is important to remember that alcohol has the potential to be addictive.

The after-effects of heavy and repeated alcohol use can make day-to-day living more difficult and can contribute to problems with sleep, physical health, finances, work and relationships.

Alcohol interferes with the chemicals in the brain's control system. The effect alcohol has on our brain makes us drunk, but it can also cause longer lasting or even permanent damage to our brains.

For example:

- Mood changes
- Learning and concentration difficulties
- Mental health problems like anxiety and depression
- Poor memory, dementia
- Alcohol related brain injuries

Taking control and staying within low-risk drinking limits

The government's unit guidelines state that there's no safe level of alcohol consumption. Unit guidelines are the same for men and women and both are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units per week (e.g. 14 units is equal to 5 pints of lager/ beer/ cider approximately).

Where can I find out more about support for alcohol issues?

Drugs and Alcohol Northern Ireland

www.drugsandalcoholni.info/alcohol/

Alcoholics Anonymous

An organisation of men and women who share their experience with each other hoping to solve their problems and help others to recover from alcoholism.

Tel: 028 9035 1222

www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie/

Al-Anon

An organisation which offers help and support to families and friends of problem drinkers.

Tel: 028 9068 2368

(6pm to 11pm, 7 days a week;

10am to 1pm, Monday to Friday)

There is a wide range of voluntary sector groups and organisations that offer support and information on a range of specific problems – please refer to the appendix at the back of this resource for a full list of services in your local health trust area.