



Alcohol... & other drugs

A&OD can change how you think, feel & behave

Drugs and alcohol are substances that can quickly change how someone thinks, feels or behaves.

Drugs can be legal (e.g., alcohol or tobacco), or illegal (e.g., cannabis or cocaine). Illicit drug use means using illegal drugs, using pharmaceuticals for non-medical purposes, like using prescription drugs without a prescription, or using them in an amount or for a reason for which they aren't intended to be used, and using certain substances inappropriately, such as sniffing petrol.

The attraction of alcohol & other drugs

People use alcohol and other drugs for many different reasons. The most common reasons people first decide to try A&OD are curiosity or because friends or family offered it or were using it.

Other reasons why people use A&OD are:

- *to relax*
- *for enjoyment or pleasure*
- *to be part of a group*
- *to avoid physical and/or psychological pain*
- *to cope with problems*
- *to feel more confident*
- *to manage aspects of living (i.e., to stay awake at work)*
- *to relieve stress*

The dangers of alcohol



Alcohol & mental health

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



Alcohol & physical health

Alcohol can impact your physical health in a number of ways. Short term effects include

- *Difficulty sleeping*
- *Lower immunity*
- *Trouble concentrating*
- *Poor motivation*



Long term alcohol use

Prolonged alcohol use can cause additional problems like

- *High blood pressure*
- *Heart disease*
- *Liver disease*
- *Brain damage*



Alcohol... & other drugs

How you can reduce your alcohol & other drug use

Start by working out how alcohol or other drugs are impacting your life. Ask yourself 'Have I been anxious or upset more than usual? Have I been losing motivation? Could this be related to my alcohol or other drug use?'

Start slow and set yourself a goal you think is achievable.

You might want to start with a short break (try a few days, then a week, then a month).

Be patient, as it might take a while before you start to see positive changes.

Let trusted family or friends know your plans so they can support you.

It can be tough when your friends are using alcohol or other drugs when you're trying to cut back.

Have a plan including things you could try if that situation comes up – have a non-alcoholic drink, go for a walk, let them know that you're cutting back.

Don't be too hard on yourself.

Whether you're cutting back or quitting, it's normal to have ups and downs.

Remember it's a process and you learn something every time you try.

How does cutting back help?

Cutting back on alcohol and other drugs can help clear your mind, improve your energy, and boost your motivation. It can be one of the most important things you can do for your mental health. Alcohol and other drugs can seem like a normal part of life for many people.

We totally get it – it can be fun, lift your mood and boost your confidence. In the longer term though, the after-effects can leave you feeling worse than before.

Some of the unexpected results of alcohol and other drugs can be changes to anxiety and thoughts, changes to mood, impacts on relationships, and doing stuff can feel harder.

Cutting back isn't always easy. It can help to think about the positives reducing your use can have. These are things like:

- *keeping your mind alert*
- *having more energy*
- *improving your sleep*
- *improving your relationships*
- *improving your engagement with work*

Getting Support

We understand that people who are experiencing mental health difficulties may use alcohol or other drugs to try and manage tough times or lift their mood. This might feel helpful in the short term but it can end up making you feel worse, and making things harder in the long term. To talk through what's going on for you and find better ways to manage, get in contact with **Rural Aid's Mental Health & Wellbeing** team by calling **1300 327 624** or email mhwb@ruralaid.org.au

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming or intense emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately or call **000** or speak to someone at **Lifeline (13 11 14)**.