

Condition:



Alcohol Dependency

Covered in this fact sheet

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What is Alcohol Dependency?

Alcohol dependency - sometimes referred to as “alcoholism” is when the body becomes accustomed to having alcohol present, and when a person develops a physical and mental dependency on alcohol.

Alcohol consumption is measured in units.

Current government guidelines are 14 units a week for men and women, best spread over 3-4 days and also to have regular drink free days during the week.



6 GLASSES OF WINE (175ML, 18%)



...OR 14 GLASSES OF SPIRITS (25ML, 40%)



...OR 6 PINTS OF LAGER/ALE (568ML, 4%)



...OR 5 PINTS OF CIDER (568ML, 4.5%)

There are varying degrees of alcohol dependency which don't always involve excessive amounts of alcohol but may be indicative of how often you are drinking alcohol.

You could be developing a dependence to alcohol if you are finding that you "need" to unwind with an alcoholic beverage, or are starting to think about drinking more often during the day or are unable to enjoy yourself or relax without the aid of alcohol.

Dependency is also characterised by the subsequent withdrawal symptoms and cravings when not drinking.

Alcohol Dependency and work

Employers may be reluctant to hire anyone with an alcohol dependency who is not addressing the issue or is in treatment. It is also important to remember that more and more organisations and companies are now doing random drug and alcohol tests on their employees, particularly jobs involving driving or operation of heavy machinery.

Having a person who is under the influence of alcohol in the workplace can become a high risk health and safety issue particularly if you use machinery in the work place or you are working in supporting others.

Most organisations will have a strict drugs and alcohol misuse policy for their employees, however if you are in treatment then there are adjustments and considerations that can be discussed with your employer.

Announce your goal

Let friends, family members, and co-workers know that you're trying to stop or cut back on drinking. If they drink, ask them to support your recovery by not doing so in front of you.

How do I know if I am alcohol dependent?

Here are some symptoms associated with harmful levels of drinking that you may want to look out for:

Problematic Drinking

Drinking more often than you used to

Drinking outside of social occasions

Not thinking about your limits

Drinking alcohol as a coping strategy

Thinking about your next drink

Alcohol Dependency

Drinking alcohol everyday

Beginning to drink earlier in the day

Needing a drink in the morning to level out

Craving and constantly thinking about drinking

Having withdrawal symptoms when not drinking

Spending more on alcohol than you can afford to

Physical withdrawal symptoms

Drinking when alone

Deliberately hiding evidence of your drinking

Loved ones and friends expressing concern about the level of your drinking

Memory issues

Dementia

Binge Drinking

Drinking excessive amounts in one session

A binge session can last a day or a week or even a month

It is characterised by the person drinking for a set period but then able to abstain from alcohol for a sustained period

Binge drinking is extremely dangerous with the with increased chances of alcohol poisoning that could become fatal

Memory issues

Dementia

Causes of alcohol dependency

Usually several factors can contribute to someone becoming alcohol dependent:

- Alcoholism can **run in families** and can be influenced by your families attitude towards alcohol.
- **Stressful events** such as bereavement or losing your job can trigger heavy drinking which can develop into alcohol dependency.
- **Trauma** or traumatic events can be a trigger for increased drinking as a way to self-medicate or as a coping strategy.
- **Habitual drinking** can also develop dependency.
- **Excessive socialising** and excessive drinking during these social events can become unhealthy habits that develop into dependency.

Talking to your GP or another health care provider about alcohol dependency

GPs will diagnose alcohol dependency by talking to you about your drinking habits and also by completing the following assessments with you;

Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (Audit C) - a widely used screening test that can help determine whether you need to change your drinking habits.

Fast Alcohol Screening Test - a simpler test to check whether your drinking has reached dangerous levels.

Severity of Alcohol Dependence Questionnaire (SADQ) - this helps identify how severely dependent on alcohol you may be.

Treatments for alcohol dependency

As mentioned before it is not advisable to stop drinking alcohol “cold turkey” if you are alcohol dependent. The treatment options are:

<h2>Structured reduction</h2>	<h2>Psychotherapy</h2>
<p>Reducing the amount you are drinking slowly. You may do this by changing what you drink or by switching to a drink with a lower alcohol content. Here are a few tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are drinking strong cider at 7% ABV you can switch down to 5%, then 4% and continue to 3%. • If you find that you are drinking both spirits and beers/lagers it is recommended that you switch to the drink with the lowest % ABV in this case, lagers. • If you are drinking 10 cans of lager a day for example, then the recommended reduction is 10%, so you will reduce by one can. After 2-3 days you can reduce again and continue doing this in steady methodical way. • You can then introduce drink free days in the week to help to further reduce your daily dependence on alcohol. 	<p>Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)</p> <p>This can be done with a therapist or in group sessions. CBT helps you to look at the links between your thoughts, feelings and actions.</p> <p>Interpersonal Therapy</p> <p>This is usually done with an individual therapist. This treatment focuses on your relationships with other people and the impact those relationships have on your personal choices as well as the effect that alcohol has on those interpersonal relationships.</p>
<h2>Peer support</h2>	<h2>SMART Recovery</h2>
<p>AA – is a 12 step programme that is peer led and supported. It is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.</p>	<p>This helps participants decide whether they have a problem, builds up their motivation to change and offers a set of proven tools and techniques to support recovery.</p>

Medication

There are medications available through your GP or clinical practitioner at the local substance misuse and alcohol dependency service. These medications work by either blocking the receptors in your brain that indicate a “craving” or cause an ill reaction when alcohol is consumed, like aversion therapy.

Detox

The where and how of an alcohol detox is determined by the level of dependency. If the consumption of alcohol is higher than 20 units daily and withdrawal symptoms have been experienced previously then hospital or clinic detox may be recommended. In less severe cases a home detox may be possible with medication to ease some of the withdrawal symptoms.

Inpatient detoxes need to be planned collaboratively with your recovery worker, GP and the clinic/hospital. Referrals for detox will need to come through your GP or local alcohol and substance misuse service.

Local substance misuse and alcohol dependency organisations will offer all of the above treatment options.

Self-Management/Care



Take notice

Being more mindful of your surroundings can help you to manage the stress that could trigger your drinking. You can also be more aware of how your body is feeling and manage cravings.



Be active

This is doing what you feel able to do, getting out and about more. Even stepping out for a short walk to the local shop. Going to the gym, walking or going for a run can help you to focus and maintain your recovery. When you exercise, your body releases chemicals called endorphins which can trigger a positive feeling in the body and reduce your need for alcohol.



Keep learning

Take opportunities that you have around you to learn something new or develop on skills you might already have to support distracting yourself and build self-esteem.



Connect

Talk to someone – consider joining a support group and enlisting the help of a mentor. AA has at least 2 meetings a day in the majority of cities. To find a meeting local to you follow this link [Local AA meeting](#).

If AA and the 12 step recovery method is not for you then you can explore SMART Recovery meetings, follow the link to find one in your area [Local SMART meeting](#).



Give

Give something back into the community or to the people around you. For example get involved in a local project.



Drinks diary

It is advisable for those who are alcohol dependent to keep a track of what, how much and when they drink. This helps to identify patterns of drinking behaviour and also shows the progress made when going through a structured reduction. Here is a link to the NHS template of a drink diary [NHS Drink Diary](#).



Distraction tool-kit

As you start to reduce your alcohol intake there will be times when all you can think about is alcohol and feel an intense craving for a drink. For those times it is a good idea to have a tool box of distractions tools and techniques. These may be:

- Meditations (there are smartphone apps that you can follow)
- Mindfulness exercises – (available at the apps store)
- A playlist that motivates you
- A movie that you like to watch
- It could be a list chores that need to be done around your house
- Go see a friend that you can talk to
- Start a craft project to keep your mind occupied and your hands busy such as knitting, crochet or drawing/ painting.



APPS

Use apps such as Drink Wise to help you monitor and control your drinking.

Useful links

Apps that may help



Field Guide for Life



Drink aware App



12 Steps- the companion



Sobriety Counter



One Day at a Time



I am Sober



The Mindfulness App



Headspace - guided meditations



My Sober Life



Stop Breathe & Think



Recovery Box



SMART Recovery - Cost benefit analysis

Helplines



Alcoholics Anonymous
0800 9177 659

The Alliance

0845 122 8608