

Alcohol

Alcohol is the most widely used drug in Australia. It affects different people in different ways and is enjoyed by many when used responsibly. As the average person ages, people typically require less alcohol to become intoxicated as a result of reduced ability to metabolise alcohol effectively. This means that it can be harder to determine a safe intake of alcohol. However, binge drinking can cause serious health, personal, financial and social problems.

Less alcohol is more

According to the Australian Department of Health, the standard for healthy men and women is no more than two standard drinks per day, with two alcohol free days per week which will reduce the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol related disease or injury. A standard drink is 100ml wine, 285ml beer or 30ml spirit.

Benzodiazepines and risk of dependence

Some of the more common benzodiazepines include: valium (diazepam), xanax (alprazolam), halcion (midazolam) and temaze (temazepam). Benzodiazepines are usually prescribed for anxiety, stress and sleep problems. They can be quite effective when one first starts using them but after using them for long periods of time, it may become hard to go without them. A good reason to reduce benzodiazepines is that the residual sedative effects can have an association with falls and can also increase the risk of cognitive decline. Do not try and stop Benzodiazepines without your doctors supervision.

Benzodiazepines for sleep problems

- Benzodiazepines 'appear' to be a simple remedy for sleep problems in later life
- In many cases sleep habits are normal for one's age. As someone gets older, they often need fewer hours of sleep and may have multiple sleep awakenings
- In some cases sleep disorders may be as a result of untreated depression or pain

Reducing alcohol may decrease the risk of:

- Hypertension, stroke, cardiopulmonary disease
- Gastrointestinal disorders, liver disorders
- Falls as a result of reduced sense of balance
- Sleep disorders
- Malnutrition
- Mouth, stomach and liver cancers
- Depression, suicide, psychoses, cognitive disorders
- Alcohol related brain damage (e.g. dementia)

Opioid painkillers

Painkillers include drugs like codeine, morphine, oxycodone and fentanyl. Opioids stimulate the reward pathway and may produce a sense of euphoria or wellbeing. This can create dependency, so check with your doctor if you are concerned.

Benzodiazepines for anxiety and stress

Sometimes people are prescribed benzodiazepines for chronic anxiety for long periods of time. See your doctor if you would like to stop or change your medication as sudden withdrawal may be difficult or even life threatening.

Risk factors for becoming dependent on drugs or alcohol:

- Bereavement – especially the loss of a partner
- Depression and anxiety
- Early stages of dementia
- Gradual evolution from safe to risky drinking
- Difficult life events

Symptoms of dependency

- Strong desire to use drugs or alcohol
- Difficulty cutting down despite negative effects
- Developing a tolerance or needing more to get the same effect
- Using more to avoid withdrawal



Seeking treatment

Sometimes it may be difficult to determine the impact that alcohol, prescription opioids or benzodiazepines are having on your life. Having a good relationship with your doctor may make it easier to develop a plan to reduce consumption over a period of time in a safe manner. Do not stop taking benzodiazepines abruptly without medical supervision as it can induce withdrawal.

Tips to reduce consumption

- It may be important to ensure you get support from your partner, friends and whoever else might be significant in your life
- Safe, supportive friends
- Find activities, hobbies and interests that are not related to drugs and alcohol
- Consider seeing a counsellor or psychologist to discuss any troubles you may be experiencing
- Developing and/or maintaining a good relationship with a doctor you feel comfortable being open and honest with

Resources

ACON offers face to face counselling as well as alcohol and other drugs specialists

Sydney

Call the Intake Officer:
(02) 9206 2000

Free Call: 1800 063 060

Email: intake@acon.org.au
www.acon.org.au

Hunter Region

Call: (02) 4962 7700

Email: hunter@acon.org.au
www.acon.org.au

Northern Rivers

Call: (02) 6622 1555

Free call: 1800 633 637

Email: northernrivers@acon.org.au
www.acon.org.au

Alcohol and Drug Information Service
(02) 9361 8000
1800 422 599 (rural)
yourroom.com.au

Lifeline

13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service
1300 659 467

Beyondblue
1300 22 4636
beyondblue.org.au

Q-Life

1800 184 527

Suicide Prevention Australia

suicidepreventionaustralia.org

Counselling at Q-life
qlife.org.au

Alcohol guidelines
drinkwise.org.au

National LGBTI Health Alliance
lgbthealth.org.au

Moodgym
moodgym.anu.edu.au

The LOVE Project is an ACON initiative aimed at creating better conversations and improved social engagement with older LGBTI community members. By understanding people's needs and preferences the LOVE project aims to facilitate greater social connectivity, improve social inclusion and provide appropriate health information for LGBTI elders.

facebook.com/LivingOlderVisiblyEngaged | twitter.com/LOVEproject | Loveproject.org.au

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