

how does

alcohol affect mental health?

A lot of people don't think alcohol is a drug – but it's the most widely used and easily accessible drug in Australia.

It's a depressant which means that it slows down the brain.

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 that one more, you shouldn't have to.

Sometimes the pressure to drink comes from friends and family, but choosing to drink alcohol should be on your terms, because there's no 'safe way' to use alcohol.

It's important that you drink as safely as possible if you're choosing to drink.

What does it 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 extreme cases, people can even 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:

- how much you weigh
- how healthy you are
- how regularly you drink
- what kind of mood you're in when you drink
- 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.

What is the connection between alcohol and mental health?

Alcohol can have a major impact on mental health. Because alcohol is a depressant, it slows your body down and changes the chemical makeup in your brain. This has many effects. It can alter:

- mood
- energy levels
- sleeping patterns
- concentration
- memory and many other things.

Alcohol also reduces inhibitions and impacts decision making, which can lead to us making decisions whilst drinking that we would not normally make sober. These can be positive or negative. It is also linked with:

- increases in risky behaviour
- increases in aggression
- self harm and suicide in people who may already be going through a tough time.

Frequent or heavy alcohol use can increase these effects, especially the impact on mood, and the ability to cope with tough times.

People who are experiencing a mental health difficulty may use alcohol to try and manage hard times, or lift their mood. This can be helpful in the short term but may make things much harder to handle in the long run.

Alcohol and your 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.

What happens if I stop drinking?

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

-  more energy
-  better sleep
-  saving money
-  better physical health
-  improved mood.

Some of these benefits you might notice within a couple of days, whereas others can have a bigger impact the longer you reduce your use.

It can be tricky giving up drinking if you've been doing it for a long time, because your body has to get used to going without it. If you're dependent on alcohol and you suddenly stop drinking, you might get withdrawal symptoms including sweating, feeling sick, anxiety, irritability, problems sleeping, hallucinations, tremors (e.g. shaking hands) and even seizures.

Because of this, it's a good idea to have a chat to a general practitioner (GP) to discuss the safest way of cutting down on your drinking.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school 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](https://www.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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