



Alcohol

Alcohol is a depressant drug which slows down the messages going to and from the brain. In small amounts, some of the effects include relaxation, increased confidence, feeling happy, reduced concentration and a slowing down of your reflexes. With larger amounts the effects can include slurred speech, intense moods (including happiness, sadness and anger), poor muscle control, nausea, vomiting and sleep. Excessive use of alcohol could possibly lead to coma or death.

Binge drinking can be described as drinking heavily over a short period of time with the intention of being intoxicated, or drinking continuously over a number of days or weeks. The number of standard drinks to be considered a binge is five or more standard drinks in one session for both men and women, however, women are often more affected than men when consuming the same amount.

In Australian culture, drinking alcohol is often a significant part of social behaviour and having 'a few too many' can be seen as a part of life. You may not be aware of how risky your drinking is if others are drinking similar amounts to you.

Binge drinking can affect you physically, by possibly causing hangovers and vomiting, however, it can also affect your emotional health. For example, feeling aggressive or anxious, worrying about overspending and shame or guilt the next morning. Other factors could include the loss of personal belongings such as wallets, phones, keys, cameras and jewellery. Binge drinking may also lead to serious consequences which could have you or those close to you concerned about your wellbeing., Driving under the influence, serious accidents, memory loss (blackouts) and risky sexual behaviours are just a few of the possible risks involved.

Tolerance

Tolerance occurs when you drink alcohol repeatedly and your body becomes adapted to the amount of alcohol you have consumed. The more regularly you drink, the more alcohol it takes for you to feel the effects. For example you may feel like you are able to drive when in actual fact you still have a high blood alcohol level. If you drink alcohol regularly and develop a tolerance for it, you may also find you become dependent on it.

Dependence

Dependence on alcohol can be psychological and/or physical. When you become psychologically dependent you may find that alcohol becomes a priority to the detriment or loss of other things in your life. You may know that there's a problem physically, or otherwise, with alcohol but continue drinking. Also you may find you give up other activities social, or otherwise, because of drinking. Physical dependence may occur when you feel you need alcohol to function normally or you use alcohol to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Re Balance Your Lifestyle

Withdrawal

Withdrawal may occur if you have become physically dependent on alcohol and you cut down or stop drinking. Some of the signs and symptoms of alcohol withdrawal are:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Irritability
- Sweating
- Tremors
- Insomnia
- High blood pressure

The effects of withdrawal really depend on a number of factors like the history of your drinking (how long and how much) and your physical make-up. Each person may experience the effects differently. If your alcohol use has been heavy or dependent, stopping suddenly can be dangerous. It's important to seek medical advice to manage the risk of seizures and delirium tremens (DT's). The withdrawal process may need to be medically monitored and the detox would more than likely be medicated.

Mental health

Often people have psychological needs that are not being met and alcohol can seem like the instant remedy. Long term use of alcohol can lead to problems in various areas of a person's life and this can lead to depression. Many people who struggle with depression or anxiety use alcohol to help them cope. The problem with this is that the alcohol provides only short-term relief from the symptoms and their feelings and this means that a person can become more and more reliant on alcohol to help them cope. If already struggling with depression or anxiety, then using alcohol may lead a person to start avoiding their fears rather than facing them. This can prevent them from seeing the situation for what it really is and can get in the way of developing more helpful ways of coping. When this happens, the depression and/or anxiety tends to grow and become more problematic in the long term.

Physical health

Drinking can affect your physical health in the short term such as causing a hangover, however, there may also be medium to long term effects on your physical health. Possible medium to long term effects include sleep disturbance, poor appetite and nutrition, poor complexion, reduced energy and fitness levels, lower immune function which makes you more vulnerable to colds and flu, liver damage, inflamed pancreas, brain damage, sexual dysfunction, infertility, shrinking of testicles and impotence.

