



Recreational drugs, alcohol and mental health

Recreational drugs and alcohol can affect your mental health in lots of different ways. And it can be hard to know where to find support if you are struggling with addiction.

These pages have information to help you understand the impact drugs and alcohol can have on your mental health.

We also have guidance on how to find the support you need – whether it's for yourself, or to help someone else.

If you want to contact us with any feedback, email contact@mind.org.uk.

Contents

How drugs and alcohol can affect your mental health.....	2
Support for recreational drug and alcohol problems	3
Interactions between recreational drugs and psychiatric medication.....	6
Helping someone with drug and alcohol problems	7
Useful contacts.....	9

How drugs and alcohol can affect your mental health

All drugs have some kind of effect on your mental health. They can affect the way you see and experience things, your mood and your behaviour.

The effects of recreational drugs might feel pleasant or unpleasant. They may last for a short time or a longer period. Some effects may continue after the drug itself has worn off.

How you react to recreational drugs is likely to depend on what you take, how you take it, and how you feel at the time.

One more pint

Alcohol only serves to make things worse when you feel low.

[Read Tom's story](#)

Can recreational drugs and alcohol cause mental health problems?

In certain cases, using recreational drugs can lead to long-term mental health problems. For example, taking them might lead to [depression](#) or [schizophrenia](#). Or they may cause similar feelings to those you already experience as part of a mental health problem.

You may also depend on recreational drugs and alcohol to help with feelings that you struggle to deal with in other ways. If you use drugs and alcohol in this way, you may be experiencing addiction. See our page on [useful contacts for drug and alcohol addiction](#) to find support.

Visit [FRANK's A-Z of drugs](#) for detailed information about how specific drugs can affect your mental health.

When I was using, I didn't have to be me. I could put on a persona or a mask; I could be a totally different person.

Medical uses of recreational drugs

Some recreational drugs may be available for medical use, even if they are usually illegal for the general public. This might include using them to help with mental health problems. For example:

- Synthetic versions of cannabis are available in some medical settings. Our page on complementary and alternative therapies has more information on [cannabis-based medicines](#).
- Ketamine, psilocybin (magic mushrooms) and LSD are being researched in the UK for possible use in treating mental health problems.

Support for recreational drug and alcohol problems

It can feel hard to ask for help for drug and alcohol problems. This may feel especially difficult if you also struggle with your mental health. But there are ways to get treatment and support for both.

This page covers:

- [GP and specialist services](#)
- [Self-help groups](#)
- [Contingency management](#)
- [Talking therapy](#)
- [Medication and detox](#)

Addiction support organisations

Visit our page of [useful contacts for drug and alcohol addiction](#) to find details of organisations and services who offer support.

GP and specialist services

If you are looking for support with your drug or alcohol use, often the first option is to:

- Contact your GP
- Visit your local [NHS drug and alcohol service](#)
- Contact a [specialist drug or alcohol organisation](#)

These services can discuss your drug use and how it is affecting you. They can also explain your treatment options, and refer you to a specialist for more support.

If you visit your local drug and alcohol service, they should assign you a key worker. This is likely to be a doctor, nurse or drug worker. They can make a care plan with you, and keep seeing you regularly to offer support.

Whichever service you use, they should discuss your options with you and take your opinions into account. They should do this before you start any treatment or support.

What is dual diagnosis?

A 'dual diagnosis' is when doctors diagnose you with both severe mental health problems and problems with recreational drug use. Having a dual diagnosis can help you access the support you need.

Visit Rethink's website to find information on [getting help if you have a dual diagnosis](#).

Self-help groups

You might find it helpful to join a self-help group for your drug or alcohol problem. For example, [Alcoholic Anonymous](#) or [Narcotics Anonymous](#).

These groups can provide support with drug use and addiction. And they can help you find a community of people who have experienced drug and alcohol problems.

You can often join these groups yourself. But if you're finding it difficult to contact these groups, your GP or drugs and alcohol service might be able to help. Someone from a drug and alcohol service may also be able to attend your first meeting with you.

[Sobriety has allowed me to tackle a lot of deep-rooted issues.](#)

Contingency management

Drug and alcohol services may offer a programme called contingency management.

This programme offers incentives for positive behaviour with certain drugs. These are often to encourage you to stop or reduce your drug use. The incentives might include vouchers for food and other rewards.

You can speak to your local drug and alcohol service if you would like to know more about contingency management.

Talking therapy

Your GP or drug and alcohol service might offer you a talking therapy. This may include behavioural couples therapy or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Behavioural couples therapy

If you are in a relationship, you and your partner may be offered couples therapy. This can help you and your partner work through any issues, including problems with drugs and alcohol.

It can also help your partner find ways to support you. In certain cases, you may be able to have therapy with a close family member.

If you are offered this therapy, it should be for at least 12 weekly sessions. You are only likely to be offered this if your partner or family member does not also experience drug problems.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Your GP or drug and alcohol service may offer you talking therapy to help with your mental health. This includes if you have stopped using drugs but still experience mental health problems.

If you experience depression or anxiety, they are likely to offer [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#). CBT aims to help you change your behaviour by focusing on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and actions.

Our pages on [talking therapy and counselling](#) have lots more information about different types of therapy, including how to access them.

I know it's always going to be hard. Every time something goes wrong in my life, I am tempted to use.

Medication and detoxification (detox)

If you have addiction problems with opioids such as heroin, your doctor or drug service might offer you a substitute medication. This will be another type of opioid drug that you take instead, such as methadone.

You might continue to take the substitute medication for a long period. This is known as 'maintenance' treatment. It can help prevent you experiencing cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

Or you might take the substitute medication for a shorter period, and eventually come off the drug completely. This is known as detoxification, or 'detox'. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has more information about [opioid detoxification](#).

You can only access these substitute drugs with a prescription. You can speak to your GP or local drug and alcohol service if you would like to learn more.

Interactions between recreational drugs and psychiatric medication

If you take two or more types of drug around the same time, this can sometimes affect how the drugs work. This is known as an interaction.

Some types of recreational drugs and alcohol can interact with prescribed medication. This includes interactions with certain [psychiatric medications](#).

Below is a list of some reported interactions between psychiatric medications and recreational drugs. There may be other interactions that we haven't listed here.

- [MAOI antidepressants](#) with many drugs – can cause very dangerous effects, including very high blood pressure, chest pain, neck stiffness, rigid muscles, flushing, vomiting and severe headaches.
- 'Reversible' MAOI antidepressants, such as [moclobemide](#), with stimulants – may cause dangerous effects similar to those caused by MAOI antidepressant interactions.
- [Antipsychotics](#) with amphetamine – may reduce the effects of both drugs.
- [Lithium](#) with alcohol or ecstasy – dehydration (low levels of water in your body) may cause lithium levels to become toxic.
- [Carbamazepine](#) with methadone – reduces your methadone levels.
- Ketamine with depressants, such as alcohol – reduces your breathing.
- Most [antidepressants](#), [antipsychotics](#) and [tranquillisers](#) with alcohol – may increase the medication's sedative effects, slowing down the body and brain's functions. They might also increase your loss of co-ordination or control over fine movement.
- [First generation antipsychotics](#) with ecstasy – may increase the risk of [movement disorders](#).
- [Citalopram](#) with cocaine – may cause high blood pressure and increase your risk of bleeding, including on the brain. This may also happen with cocaine and other [SSRI antidepressants](#).
- [Risperidone](#) with cocaine – may reduce 'high' of cocaine.
- [Clozapine](#) or [olanzapine](#) with cannabis – reduces your levels of clozapine or olanzapine.
- [Clozapine](#) or [olanzapine](#) with smoked tobacco – reduces your levels of clozapine and olanzapine. Your dose may need to be adjusted if you stop or start smoking while taking these medications.

Helping someone with drug and alcohol problems

This page covers:

- [Tips for supporting someone with drug or alcohol problems](#)
- [Can I section someone for drug or alcohol use?](#)
- [Looking after yourself](#)

Addiction support organisations

Visit our page of [useful contacts for drug and alcohol addiction](#) to find details of organisations who may be able to help.

Tips for supporting someone with drug and alcohol problems

It can feel difficult to support someone who is struggling with recreational drug or alcohol use. It might make you feel worried, frustrated or lonely. But there are things you can do to help.

This might include encouraging them to seek help for the first time. Our page on [support for drugs, alcohol and mental health](#) has information on different support options.

If you are supporting someone seeking help for the first time, you could:

- **Reassure them** that it is OK to seek help.
- **Help them find out what services are available locally.** Turning Point's website has a [tool to help you find local services for drug and alcohol use](#) (the tool refers to it as 'substance misuse').
- **Go to appointments with them**, if they would like you to. This may especially help for their first visit.

If they already receive treatment or support, you could help them stick to their treatment plan, go to appointments and meet their targets.

As well as helping them find treatment and support, these are some ways to help someone feel supported:

- **Find ways to spend more time together.** You could try joining in with any activities that they enjoy.
- **Listen to them** if they want to talk about their experiences or how they feel.
- Try to **explain how their alcohol or drug use is affecting you.**

If you are a parent concerned about your child's drug use, the charity Adfam has [information for parents supporting children who use recreational drugs](#).

Can I section someone for drug or alcohol use?

Doctors cannot section someone just because they are addicted to drugs or alcohol.

But if someone who takes drugs or alcohol also has mental health problems, doctors may be able to section them. This is usually only for a mental health emergency, for example if their safety is at risk.

If you are someone's [nearest relative](#), you may be able to ask for them to have a mental health assessment.

Our pages on [sectioning](#) have more information.

Sometimes it's the people looking after others who need care and understanding themselves.

Looking after yourself

Supporting someone else can have a big impact on your own life. By looking after yourself, you might also find it easier to offer support to others.

These are some things you can do to help yourself:

- **Talk to someone you trust.** It can help to discuss how you feel with someone you trust, such as a friend, family member or counsellor. See our page on [how to find a therapist](#) for tips on finding a counsellor to talk to.
- **Join a support group.** This might be something you attend in person or online. Or you might be able to call a helpline, to speak to someone over the phone. See our information on organisations who can help you support someone else for details of organisations which offer this service.
- **Try self-care.** This could be finding new ways to relax, be creative or spending time in nature. Or it could be taking care of your physical health, or finding ways to improve your sleep. Our page on [mental wellbeing](#) has lots of tips for taking care of yourself.

- If you care for someone with a dual diagnosis of mental health and drug or alcohol problems, you should be able to **have a [carer's assessment](#)**. This may help you get more practical support with your caring responsibilities.

Useful contacts

- [Alcohol support organisations](#)
- [Drug support organisations](#)
- [Organisations who can help you support someone else](#)

Worried about gambling addiction?

Our pages on money and mental health have information on [gambling and addiction](#), including organisations who can help.

Alcohol support organisations

Below are some organisations who can help if you have problems with alcohol.

Our page on [support for drug and alcohol problems](#) has more information on the ways to get help for alcohol use.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

[0800 9177 650](tel:08009177650)

help@aamail.org (email helpline)

alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Help and support for anyone with alcohol problems.

Alcohol Change UK

alcoholchange.org.uk

Information and support options for people worried about how much alcohol they are drinking, in both English and Welsh.

FRANK

[0300 123 6600](tel:03001236600)

talktofrank.com

Confidential advice and information about drugs, their effects and the law.

London Friend

londonfriend.org.uk

Offers a range of services around London to support LGBT health and wellbeing including support groups and counselling.

Turning Point

turning-point.co.uk

Health and social care services in England for people with a learning disability. Also supports people with mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse or unemployment.

We Are With You

wearewithyou.org.uk

Supports people with drug, alcohol or mental health problems, and their friends and family.

Drug support organisations

Below are some organisations who can help if you have problems with using recreational drugs.

Our page on [support for drug and alcohol problems](#) has more information on the ways to get help for drug use.

Club Drug Clinic

[020 3317 3000](tel:02033173000)

clubdrugclinic.cnwl.nhs.uk

Information and support for people worried about their use of recreational drugs. The clinic offers help in the London boroughs of Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster.

Cocaine Anonymous UK

[0800 612 0225](tel:08006120225)

helpline@cauk.org.uk

cauk.org.uk

Help and support for anyone who wants to stop using cocaine.

DAN 24/7

[0808 808 2234](tel:08088082234)

[81066](tel:81066) (text DAN)

dan247.org.uk

A bilingual English and Welsh helpline for anyone in Wales in need of further information or help relating to drugs or alcohol. Also known as the Wales Drug & Alcohol Helpline.

FRANK

[0300 123 6600](tel:03001236600)

talktofrank.com

Confidential advice and information about drugs, their effects and the law.

London Friend

londonfriend.org.uk

Offers a range of services around London to support LGBT health and wellbeing including support groups and counselling.

Marijuana Anonymous

[0300 124 0373](tel:03001240373)

helpline@marijuana-anonymous.org.uk

marijuana-anonymous.co.uk

Help for anyone worried about cannabis use.

Narcotics Anonymous

[0300 999 1212](tel:03009991212)

ukna.org

Support for anyone who wants to stop using drugs.

Release

[020 7324 2989](tel:02073242989)

ask@release.org.uk (email helpline)

release.org.uk

National charity that offers free and confidential advice about drugs and the law.

Turning Point

turning-point.co.uk

Health and social care services in England for people with a learning disability. Also supports people with mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse or unemployment.

We Are With You

wearewithyou.org.uk

Supports people with drug, alcohol or mental health problems, and their friends and family.

Organisations who can help you support someone else

Below are some organisations who can help you if you are affected by someone else's recreational drug and alcohol use.

Our page on [helping someone with drug or alcohol problems](#) also has advice on how you can offer support.

Adfam

adfam.org.uk

Information and support for friends and family of people with drug or alcohol problems.

Al-Anon

[0800 0086 811](tel:08000086811)

helpline@al-anonuk.org.uk

al-anonuk.org.uk

Offers support meetings across the UK for anyone whose life is affected, or has been affected, by someone else's drinking. Also provides online support meetings, and a confidential helpline.

DrugFAM

[0300 888 3853](tel:03008883853)

drugfam.co.uk

Provides support to anyone affected by someone else's harmful use of drugs, alcohol or gambling.

Families Anonymous

[0207 4984 680](tel:02074984680)

famanon.org.uk

Support for friends and family of people with drug problems.

National Association for Children of Alcoholics

[0800 358 3456](tel:08003583456)

helpline@nacoa.org.uk

nacoa.org.uk

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Provides information, advice and support for anyone affected by a parent's drinking, including adults.

We Are With You

wearewithyou.org.uk

Supports people with drug, alcohol or mental health problems, and their friends and family.

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References are available on request.