



JUST THE FACTS: Alcohol and Drugs

How Do You Know There is a Problem?



At first, alcohol and drugs may seem to make things better. They may help you sleep, temporarily forget problems, or feel more relaxed. But these short-term benefits can turn sour fast. In the long run, using alcohol and drugs to cope with stress will create a whole new set of very serious problems, and will make the problems that led you to drink or use worse.

Sometimes it might be hard for you to tell whether alcohol or drug use is itself becoming a problem. A good rule of thumb is that your alcohol or drug consumption might be causing problems when it interferes with your:

- Work or school.
- Relationships.
- Physical health.
- Mental well-being.
- Spirituality.
- Self respect.
- Family.
- Money.
- Legal record.

Here are some questions you can ask to see if you have or are developing a problem:	Y	N
• Have friends or family members commented on how much or how often you drink or use other substances?		
• Have you found yourself feeling guilty about your drinking or drug use?		
• Have you found yourself drinking or using more over time?		
• Have you tried unsuccessfully to cut down your alcohol or drug use?		
• Does your drinking or drug use ever affect your ability to fulfill personal obligations such as parenting, work, or school responsibilities?		
• Do you drink or use in situations that are physically dangerous such as driving or operating machinery?		
• Have you found that you need more alcohol or drugs to get the same effect?		
• Do you drink or use substances alone when angry, sad, bored or lonely?		
• Do you drink or use substances when you are reminded of upsetting deployment memories?		
• Do the consequences of drinking or using ever make you late for work?		
• Does your family worry about your drinking or drug use?		
• Do you ever drink or use drugs after telling yourself you won't?		
• Do you ever forget what you did while drinking or using?		



How Do You Know There is a Problem?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, maybe it’s time to step back and look at how much you are using. You might try cutting back and getting some help from friends, family, community groups (like AA/NA) or a health care provider.

Here are some thoughts to consider. They are called “CAGE” questions—these questions can help you figure out if you feel “caged” by your alcohol or drug use. Over the past year...

- C** — Have you ever felt that you should **CUT** down on your drinking or drug use?
- A** — Have people **ANNOYED** you by criticizing your drinking or drug use?
- G** — Have you ever felt bad or **GUILTY** about your drinking or drug use?
- E** — Have you ever had a drink or used a substance first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover (i.e., as an **EYE-OPENER**)?

If you answered yes to any of these four questions, we encourage you to think seriously about how your drug and alcohol use is negatively affecting your life, and whether it’s enough of a problem that you’d like to work on changing your habits.

What To Do if Alcohol or Drugs are Causing Problems

If you think that that your alcohol or drug use has become (or is becoming) a problem, there are a number of things you can do. First, recognize that you are not alone and that others are available and willing to lend help. Second, get help! Getting help is really important if you really want to successfully cut back or stop drinking or using. We encourage you to get help even if you are not sure that you would be able to quit or if you are feeling guilty about the problem. Asking for help and support takes a great deal of courage and strength, but it greatly increases your odds in beating this problem.

Who to Contact for Help

Here are some sources you can contact for help with substance issues.

- Call a health care provider (for example, your primary care doctor).
- Contact a psychologist or therapist.
- Call your local VA hospital or Vet Center.
- Contact your local Alcoholic’s Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.
- Contact a local mental health association.
- Talk with a spiritual counselor.
- Ask friends or family member who are clean and sober.

Here are some useful websites that give more information about alcohol and drug use and how to get help.

- **Alcohol and Drug Abuse Information and Resources:** <http://www.alcoholanddrugabuse.com/>
- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Frequently Asked Questions:** <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/faq/faq.htm>
- **Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator:** <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- **Alcoholics Anonymous Homepage:** <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/>
- **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and the Armed Services:** http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.org/en_pdfs/p-50_AA&ArmedServices.pdf