



# Alcohol and drug use & mental health

## What is mental health?

Mental health is a positive state in which people experience emotional, social, psychological and spiritual wellbeing and resilience.

If you have good mental health, you are better placed to:

1. cope with life's normal stresses
2. work productively
3. achieve your potential
4. contribute to the community
5. enjoy positive relationships with others.

## Work can impact your mental health

Working conditions and a poor work health and safety culture may cause stress, fatigue, physical injury, and/or enable risky alcohol or drug use.

These factors can contribute to the development of mental illnesses, such as anxiety or depression, or worsen an existing condition.

Discussion Date \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor/Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Workers' Names \_\_\_\_\_

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### Stress indicators

- Drop in work performance
- Fatigue
- Feeling excessively frustrated, irritable, angry or worried
- Headaches and muscular tension
- Memory problems
- Mood swings
- Sleep disturbances
- Stomach upsets and indigestion.

### Depression and anxiety indicators

Feeling anxious or sad when facing challenges is normal. However, you might be experiencing depression and/or anxiety if you:

1. have a persistently low mood for more than two weeks
2. lose interest in your usual activities
3. feel so overwhelmed that your ability to function decreases.

Ask for help if you are struggling with your mental health.

Ask others if they need help.



## Getting support and treatment

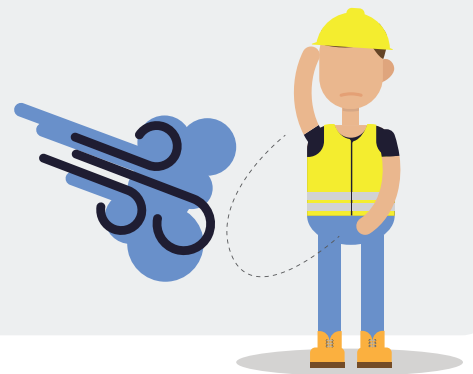
If you feel depressed or anxious, speak with your supervisor, a trusted family member or friend, your GP, or a counselling service. You might need medical assistance or social support to help you through the bad times and to feel like your self again.

Do not misuse alcohol and drugs to relieve physical or mental pain. Alcohol and drug use might provide short-term relief, but they will not rectify your situation and might cause more problems for you.

Long-term reliance on, or risky alcohol or drug use, can:

1. worsen your original condition
2. contribute to secondary physical and/or mental health problems
3. weaken your relationships with others.

Drinking alcohol and misusing drugs to solve work/life stressors is like weeing into the wind. You will feel momentary relief but end up with wet shoes.



## How do alcohol and drugs impact mental health?

There is a complex relationship between alcohol and drug use and mental health. For example...

### Mental health impact of alcohol and/or drug use



Alcohol

Risky alcohol use can contribute to:

1. depression and/or an [alcohol-related mental health disorder](#)
2. increased risk of self-harm and suicide
3. poorer mental health outcomes for people with existing conditions.

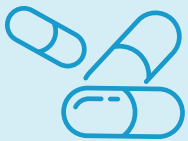
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## Mental health impact of alcohol and/or drug use



**Benzodiazepines (Benzos)**

Benzos might be prescribed for insomnia or anxiety or to help with sleep problems. However, they are highly addictive, and regular or long-term use can contribute to:

1. anxiety and depression
2. confusion, impaired thinking and memory loss
3. difficulty sleeping or disturbing dreams
4. feelings of isolation, euphoria, or disconnection from reality
5. irritability, paranoia and aggression
6. suicidal thoughts.



**Cannabis**

Regular cannabis use can:

- increase the risk of experiencing mental illness episodes
- worsen an existing mental health condition.

Cannabis use has been linked to:

- panic attacks
- depression and anxiety
- psychotic episodes
- schizophrenia.



**Cocaine**

Cocaine use can increase the risk of:

1. depression
2. anxiety, paranoia and panic attacks
3. mood swings
4. sleep disturbances
5. cocaine psychosis.



**Heroin**

Regular and ongoing heroin use:

1. is linked to depression
2. can worsen symptoms of depression and anxiety
3. can increase suicide risk.

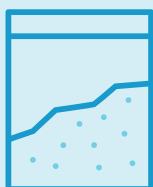
Heroin can also mask symptoms of psychosis and reduce the effectiveness of psychiatric medication.

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## Mental health impact of alcohol and/or drug use



Methamphetamine

People who use methamphetamine may experience mental health symptoms during the intoxication and/or 'come down' and 'crash' phase.

Mental health effects include:

- mood swings and panic attacks
- anxiety and depression
- paranoia and hallucinations
- loss of enjoyment in usual activities
- difficulty sleeping.

Regular use can also cause an 'ice psychosis' and aggressive or erratic behaviour.



Prescribed painkillers/opioids

There is a two-way relationship between prescribed painkillers/opioid misuse and depression:

1. If you misuse painkillers/opioids, you are at greater risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorders
2. If you have depression, you might misuse painkillers/opioids to relieve mental anguish and physical pain commonly experienced with depression.



Smoking

Smoking is also associated with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and alcohol and drug dependence.

Many people believe smoking reduces stress and report feeling less stressed after a cigarette. However, smoking can increase stress.

People who quit smoking become less stressed, anxious and depressed. Quitting smoking for at least six weeks improves:

1. mental health
2. mood
3. general wellbeing.

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## Discussion topics

1. What situations make you feel stressed, anxious, or depressed?
2. What can you do when you feel stressed, anxious, or depressed?
3. What can you do to help others?

## Handouts, Apps & Online Programs (available on the WorkLife website)

### 1. WorkLife Posters

- [Overcoming Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Tips](#)
- [Getting Help: Mental Health Services](#)

### 2. Black Dog Institute has a range of fact sheets about stress, anxiety and depression:

- Anxiety Self Test <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/clinical-resources/anxiety/anxiety-self-test>
- Depression Self Test <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/clinical-resources/depression/depression-self-test>

- MyCompass is a free online, interactive self-help program designed to address mild to moderate symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression through personalised online treatments. Available from <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/getting-help/self-help-tools-apps>

### 3. Beyond Blue

- Anxiety Checklist and Information <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety>
- Depression Information <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/depression>.

Resources and handouts are available at <https://worklife.flinders.edu.au/external-site-resources>.

References are available at <https://worklife.flinders.edu.au/references>.