

LifeSkills

How to control your alcohol consumption

The effects of alcohol

The immediate effect of alcohol is that reactions of the brain and nerves are dulled. When taken in small quantities, the effect is a pleasant, relaxed feeling. However, when consumed in larger amounts, alcohol can impair judgment, coordination, and memory.

The quick fix

For some people, alcohol is seen as quick relief for a variety of personal problems. These can range from criticism by a supervisor at work, a nasty argument with a friend or loved one, to even more serious events such as job loss or a death in the family.

The short term effects of having a number of drinks in such situations may be attractive. In the long term, however, the effects are more serious, especially for the heavy drinker.

A good sign

If people close to you— family, friends, or co-workers—have told you they think you might have a drinking problem, this pamphlet presents some strategies to help you reconsider your use of alcohol to smooth out the rough passages in your life.

The fact that you are reading this pamphlet is already a good sign.

The true consequences of your drinking habits

When drinking becomes a problem, people invariably experience negative consequences. These include difficulties with personal relationships, job performance, and health.

While it may be difficult to face these consequences, doing so will give you a more realistic view of your use of alcohol and provide an incentive to modify your habits.

Gauging the consequences of your drinking

Careful consideration of the following questions will help you assess the consequences of your drinking habits. We suggest that you give them serious thought.

Personal consequences

What are the negative consequences I have experienced as a result of my drinking?

In answering this question, list the behaviors you find yourself regretting afterwards. For example driving when you know you have drunk more than the legal limit or taking out your anger on family or friends. Also consider the consequences of going to work with a hangover in terms of your work performance and relations with co-workers.

Consequences for others

What are the negative consequences of my drinking on my friends and family?

Consider how your drinking affects people you share your life with. Be as specific as possible. For example if drinking has been a direct cause of a fight with your spouse, or your losing patience with your kids. List occasions when you have lost control and engaged in verbal or physical abuse.

Facing these issues will not be easy, but represents an important step towards change.

Consequences of sobriety

How would being sober have a positive impact on my life?

Make a list of the positive outcomes of controlling your alcohol consumption. In making the list think of your family relationships, your friendships, your work life, and your health.

The next step

Life is often challenging and problems invariably crop up. It may be that you have been using alcohol as a means of easing your problems.

If you have come to recognize that drinking does not make the problems go away, you are ready to take the next step. That is to stop using alcohol as a means to "freeze" or neutralize your problems and anxieties. If you can take that step, you have put yourself in a position to develop the skills to deal realistically with your problems and anxieties.

Controlling your drinking

Take note of the circumstances in which you don't drink or feel the need to drink. Also make note of what you do when you overcome the urge to drink. Being conscious of what happens in these moments will help you increase the frequency with which they occur.

As these moments multiply, so will your feelings of confidence. The more you value yourself, the less you will feel the need to use alcohol to freeze feelings of anxiety or discomfort.

Help yourself

Tell your friends and your family, people you can count on, that you want to stop drinking. Remember you are not alone. You may even have a friend who has had to deal with his or her drinking problem who can provide you with support and encouragement.

If someone close to you has problems with alcohol

Friends and family often shield the drinker from negative consequences of his or her behaviors. They look after them when they're drunk and hung over, and even take over their responsibilities.

Both in the short and long run, this does not help. Allowing the problem drinker to deal with the consequences of his or her drinking is the best way to encourage change.

Professional help

If alcohol is seriously affecting your personal life, your work, or your physical health, you should seek professional help.

La version française de ce document sera disponible sur Internet sous peu. Vous pouvez vous la procurer en composant le 1-800-668-4125.

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