

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Introduction

The use and misuse of alcohol and other non-prescription drugs is one of the more controversial issues in our society, and often a source of conflict between generations and between sections of society. It's not the purpose of this page – or of the NTU student counselling service – to tell people how to behave or to seek to label them as alcohol or drug abusers. However alcohol and other drugs are powerful substances with a potential to harm users; we would encourage people to take care of themselves when considering using them and to avoid taking any risks which they might regret later.

No universal classifications ignore the fact that significant alcohol and drug use is an accepted part of many social groups. What is seen as risky or inappropriate behaviour by one group is accepted as normal by another. Use of alcohol and drugs can be classified as –

- *Abstinent* – no use is made
- *Controlled* – people have made a conscious decision, have evaluated the risks and can stop if they want
- *Impulsive* – use is unpredictable and can lead to unexpected accidents and harm. However this is not continual or dependent use.
- *Habitual* – the use of alcohol or drugs have become a significant and important part of the person's lifestyle. Stopping would not be easy.
- *Dependent* – there is a high degree of physical and psychological addiction. Alcohol and drug use disrupts or rules the person's life. Stopping is not possible without considerable support.

Obviously abstinence and controlled use are the least risky categories and dependency the most problematic. However many people making impulsive habitual use of drink and drugs are not totally happy with their situation.

Consequences of Use

If you are wondering about your alcohol or drug use, have you considered the following possible consequences:

Psychological Consequences

Are you using alcohol or drugs to escape from a problem which you might be able to solve if you faced it? If so, you may be perpetuating your shyness, anxiety, depression, unhappiness etc. rather than dealing with it once and for all. Also alcohol and drugs don't permanently change our world. They allow us to feel a temporary confidence or happiness, but the effect is usually one of borrowed time. Often the unhappiness or anxiety returns even more strongly once the effects of the substance wear off.

Alcohol and drugs can cause psychological problems by themselves. Alcohol can commonly cause depression and can trigger anxiety or even psychosis (loss of mental hold on reality).

Alcohol and drugs are habit forming. In addition a tolerance usually develops, leading to an increasing degree of use for the same effect.

Social Consequences

Alcohol and drug use can lead to financial problems. Also, drug use may have legal implications, and you may be arrested by the police to possessing illegal drugs. Also, drunkenness can lead to anti-social behaviour that could also involve the police. Although alcohol is legal, assault and driving when drunk is not.

Sentences for supplying drugs can be heavy. Any conviction for alcohol or drug related offences may severely limit the opportunities open to you in the future, in terms of employment or adoption/fostering.

Pronounced use of alcohol or drugs tends to rigidly define social groups, so it may limit your circle of friends.

Continual or large scale use of alcohol has a bad effect on most people's sex life.

Physical Consequences

Alcohol definitely lowers people's ability to resist harming themselves when they have problems. Alcohol can lower people's inhibitions against hurting others.

Alcohol greatly lessens people's ability to say no to unwanted sexual encounters which they would have definitely avoided had they been sober.

Many serious accidents are alcohol and drug related.

There are health risks attached to long-term consistent use of alcohol and drugs.

There is some evidence to support that, for example, prolonged recreational use of MDMA (Ecstasy) can lead to anxiety and depression.

Taking Control

If you want to take control of your use of alcohol or drugs, the following suggestions may help –

- Make a list of the advantages and drawbacks of your alcohol and drug use which are personally significant to you. Decide whether you would like to lessen the disadvantages.
- Keep a diary of your consumption over a week. Be honest about the amounts you are using and the reasons which trigger that use. Consider whether you could limit your intake by changing your routine so as not to put you in tempting situations.
- Talk to someone whom you trust about your use, to see if they feel you have cause for concern.
- Consider what drugs you are using. In particular note when you use concentrated or particularly dangerous forms of drink and drugs. Can you substitute a less potent alternative?
- Consider the social pressures to consume. Can you limit your exposure to these – e.g. stop buying in rounds, meeting in pubs etc.

- Consider what emotions trigger consumption. Are you using alcohol and drugs to help deal with certain feelings – frustration, anxiety, shyness, boredom, self-loathing etc. Can you find alternative means of dealing with these feelings?
- Try a month of abstinence to see whether you can find different ways of dealing with problems, and whether there are distinct advantages to being able to bring your sober, drug free, self to look at various problems.

Books

Overcoming Problem Drinking by Marcantonio Spada. Constable and Robinson Publishing Ltd. Self-help techniques for cutting down your drinking.

Freedom from Addiction: The Secret Behind Successful Addiction Busting by Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrrell. HG Publishing. Self help for beating drug and drink problems and sorting out any underlying issues.

Adult Children of Alcoholics by Janet G Woititz. Health Communications. A carefully written book to help you deal with the consequences of heavy drinking in your family history.

Chris Sullivan's Simple Effective Way to Control Cannabis by Chris Sullivan, published by himself. Self help for addressing cannabis over-use in a realistic way.

Overcoming Your Alcohol, Drug and Recovery Habits: An Empowering Alternative to AA and 12-Step Treatment by Jim DeSena. Sharp Press. If the whole culture of AA and 12-Step doesn't work for you.

Other Sources of Support

Frank 24 hour National Drugs Helpline :Tel: 0300 123 6600
www.Talktofrank.com

Recovery in Nottingham (services to tackle problem drug use)
Tel: 0800 066 5362 www.recoveryinnottingham.co.uk

APAS (Alcohol & Gambling Solutions) - www.apas.org.uk
Tel: 0115 8240 550

Alcoholics Anonymous National Helpline : 0800 9177 650
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Narcotics Anonymous UK Helpline :Tel: 0300 999 1212
www.ukna.org