

It helps to keep drugs and alcohol out of the picture

Some people turn to alcohol or other drugs to deal with or block out the effects of their depression and anxiety. While it might seem like a good way to take your mind off things, it can actually make you feel worse in the long run.

+ the risks

Alcohol and drugs can:

- Make your symptoms worse.
- Interfere with any medication you might be taking for your illness.
- Affect your mental health as well as your physical health.
- Cause other long-term health problems.

Research also shows that certain ways of using these drugs (such as binge drinking or smoking marijuana often) can actually increase the chances of developing depression in the first place.

Whether or not you're depressed, it's important to think about the amount of alcohol you're drinking or the drugs that you take. Keep a close check on your drinking and drug use – including how much, when and why.

You might want to test whether or not you can decrease the amount of alcohol you're drinking or the drugs you're taking, and whether you can keep up this lower level of daily or weekly use. For example, if you're drinking alcohol lots or often, see if you can cut back to one or two drinks a day. If you find you can't do this, it's a sign that you may have a dependency problem.

If you want to talk to someone who can help:

Call the Depression Helpline on **0800 111 757**

Call Alcohol and Drug Helpline on **0800 787 797**

Call Quitline on **0800 778 778**

Text The Lowdown team for free on **5626**

Or talk to your doctor

Recreational and party drugs

- Marijuana is commonly used in New Zealand, but is not free from harm. Heavy or long term use can cause depression or anxiety, and there is no 'safe' level, because it affects people differently.
- A high proportion of people who use amphetamines (speed) and related drugs develop depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and paranoia.
- Ecstasy and other party drugs can cause severe mental and emotional disturbance, especially in the few days following the use of these drugs.
- Withdrawing from these drugs can make you depressed, anxious, and irritable.

Cigarette smoking

It's common for people with depression or anxiety to start smoking, and they can become addicted very quickly. Because tobacco is such an addictive drug, it's very hard to stop smoking, and people who have smoked for a long time sometimes become depressed or anxious when they try to quit. It's important to consult your doctor if you develop depression or anxiety when you try to quit smoking.

+ what you can do

Cutting down on alcohol

If you're worried that the amount of alcohol you're drinking is making your depression or anxiety worse, or that you're just drinking too much in general, here are some tips to cut back:

- Try not to drink by yourself, or when you're feeling down or anxious.
- Don't keep alcohol at your house.
- Set yourself a limit (say no more than two drinks) and get your friends to help you in not exceeding your limit.
- Leave the party or the pub early if you think you'll drink too much, or suggest somewhere else to go with your friends such as the movies.
- Switch to low alcohol or non alcoholic drinks.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones (such as juice, water or soft drinks).
- Avoid drinking during the week.
- Have alcohol-free days, weekends or weeks.
- Sip slowly.
- Keep a count of your drinks and stop at a certain number. The recommended maximum daily limit is six standard drinks for men and four for women, but this may be too much alcohol for you. In any one week drink no more than 21 standard drinks for men and 14 standard drinks for women. (A standard drink equates to one small glass of beer, one small glass of wine, or one nip of spirits.)

When you need to stop altogether

Sometimes for health reasons you need to stop drinking alcohol or using drugs completely.

This is usually the case when:

- You're pregnant or wanting to become pregnant (alcohol can harm the baby).
- Your depression or anxiety is severe.
- You're having physical health problems.
- You're having serious social or personal problems because of your drug/alcohol use.
- You're taking medication to treat your depression or anxiety.

If you're used to drinking alcohol, smoking or taking drugs regularly, stopping completely can be really hard, and you may need professional help. It's best to let your family and friends know what you're trying to do, and get their support.

Depending on how bad the problem is, you might need to take medication when you first start to give up (this is known as the 'withdrawal period') or to help you stay sober. If this is the case, you need to speak to a doctor who can help you during your withdrawal period.

Even if this isn't the case for you, it might be a good idea to test whether or not you can stop using alcohol or drugs completely for some time (such as one or two months).

+ getting help

If you think you have a problem with drugs or alcohol and you want help:

- **Call Alcohol and Drug Helpline 0800 787 797**
- **Quitline can help you quit smoking. Call them toll-free on 0800 778 778**

If you want to talk to a trained counsellor about how you're feeling, or you've got any questions, you can:

- **Call the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757**
- **Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626**

They can listen to your story, and come up with ideas about what might help. They can also put you in touch with health professionals close to where you live, if that's what you want.

Or for more information you can visit:

**www.depression.org.nz or www.thelowdown.co.nz
www.alac.org.nz or www.nzdf.org.nz**

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge information sourced from: NZ Mental Health Survey 2006, NZ Guidelines Group, Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists, MaGPIe Research Group, Beyond Blue (Australia).

For more information and fact sheets visit
www.depression.org.nz

newzealand.govt.nz