

Alcohol, mental health and the workplace

The relationship between alcohol and mental health is complex. Some of us use it as a way to try to help manage symptoms of anxiety and depression, but excessive drinking is likely to make those symptoms worse over time.

How might alcohol and mental health issues show up in the workplace?

If we are struggling with our drinking, we may find that our work is affected. For example, we may experience tiredness and physical symptoms related to hangovers, which can make it more difficult to complete tasks at work and may put pressure on our relationships with our colleagues. These difficulties can in turn have a negative impact on our mental wellbeing.

Similarly, if we are struggling with our mental health, this can mean our work is affected further. A lack of motivation, increased irritability with the people we work with, and making more mistakes are likely to change our approach to, and our ability to perform, work-related tasks.

What can I do if I'm an employee?

- **Speak to your line manager in confidence.** If you come to rely on alcohol to manage your mental health problems, that reliance can itself become a problem. You may well find that your drinking affects your working and home life – both things that can undermine your mental wellbeing. If you need support, consider speaking to your line manager in confidence – it's likely they have already noticed a change in your behaviour.
- **Seek professional help if you're struggling.** If you would prefer not to speak to your manager about the mental health problem you are experiencing, you can seek professional advice from your GP. Note that if you are considered disabled (as defined by the Equality Act) because of your mental health problem, you have specific rights in relation to getting support at work. The charity Mind has advice about this on its website.

- **Find ways to manage your drinking.** Making lifestyle changes could help your situation. For example, keeping a drinking diary or downloading an app to help you keep track of your alcohol consumption for a few weeks can help you understand your drinking pattern, so you can work out what you're happy with and what you're not. Download our free 'Try Dry: The Dry January app' to help you set some goals.
- **Take a break from drinking.** You could also consider taking an extended break from alcohol, like having a Dry January, which has been shown to help people drink more healthily year-round. As well as taking a break or cutting down on your drinking, try to establish whether you are eating properly and taking enough regular exercise outdoors, key things that can directly improve your mental health.¹

What can I do if I'm an employer?

At Alcohol Change UK we understand these issues and are here to help. Our workplace services are designed to help employers and employees. We can deliver in-house training to your HR and Wellbeing teams as well as conducting a review of your policies.

According to the charity Mind, almost a third of workers say that they would not be comfortable speaking with their manager about their mental health.² Similarly, the stigma associated with having difficulties with alcohol acts as a barrier to seeking help. Employers need to facilitate a healthy, empathetic environment whereby employees who need help with their physical and/or mental wellbeing feel confident and able to ask for advice, and will be supported in getting the help they need without discrimination.

Contact us today to discuss the ways in which we can help you develop and implement workplace policies, including a specific alcohol policy, which provide a framework for how your organisation will support employees with personal difficulties that they may be facing.

Visit our website to find out more.

www.alcoholchange.org.uk

¹ Barton, J., & Pretty, J. (2010). What is the best dose of nature and green exercise for improving mental health? A multi-study analysis. *Environmental science & technology*, 44(10), 3947-3955.

² Mind, online, available at <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/>