Alcohol and other drug use: GP information sheet

People use alcohol and other drugs for many reasons, such as relaxing, socialising or coping with stress. For some people, use may start to feel harder to manage or begin to affect parts of life. Change is possible, and support is available at any stage.

About this sheet. We have written this sheet as psychologists, in the hope that GPs may find some of it useful. It offers general information only and is not a clinical tool.

How it may show up in everyday life

Some people, or the people close to them, may notice things like these. They can look quite different from one person to the next.

Everyday life

- Use might creep up over time
- Some people may want to cut back
- Plans could start to fit around use

Feelings

- Alcohol or drugs might be used to cope with stress
- Mood may dip afterwards
- Sleep could be affected

At work or study

- Mornings might feel harder
- Concentration may drift
- Some days could be missed

In relationships

- Loved ones might express concern
- Conflict may arise
- Connection could feel strained

Health

- People might notice changes in energy
- Sleep may feel less restful
- Some may wonder about their health

Mixed feelings

- People may feel two ways about change
- Motivation might come and go
- Small steps can matter

What the person might be bringing

People may feel worried about being judged when talking about alcohol or drugs. They might feel ashamed, or unsure whether their use is something to talk about.

A warm, curious conversation may help it feel safer to talk. Feeling heard can be a meaningful first step.

What GPs already do well

Opening gently

GPs are often the first person someone feels able to talk to. A gentle, non judgemental opening can help people share.

Listening to the story

GPs often know the person, and sometimes their family, over many years. That wider view of someone's life can be very valuable.

A steady point of contact

As people explore their options, the GP can remain a familiar, steady presence, working alongside other professionals.

Seeing the whole person

GPs often hold the bigger picture of someone's health and wellbeing, which can help people feel understood.

What psychology may offer

Understanding

- Time to make sense of experiences
- Exploring what use means for the person
- Recognising strengths as well as challenges
- A safe, non judgemental space

Practical and family support

- Support for making changes, at the person's pace
- Ideas for coping with stress
- Support for partners and families
- Working alongside the GP and other professionals

Everyday things some people find helpful

These are simply possibilities. What helps one person may not suit another.

- Alcohol free days
- Other ways to unwind
- Planning ahead for social events
- Regular sleep and meals
- Time with supportive people
- Noticing small changes

Trusted Australian resources

Alcohol and Drug Foundation adf.org.au

Counselling Online counsellingonline.org.au

Medicare Mental Health medicarementalhealth.gov.au

Referring to Strategic Psychology

Our psychologists work with children, adolescents and adults. If a client would like to see one of our team, they can call us on 02 6262 6157 or visit strategicpsychology.com.au. Medicare rebates may be available with a GP referral.

This sheet offers general information for GPs to consider. It does not replace clinical judgement.