

SUBSTANCE ABUSE TIP SHEET

1. Make a Change

For most people engaging in **substance abuse**, the most difficult decision to make is whether or not to give up. They may have a sense that they cannot cope without the substance, so it is understandable that it can initially be very difficult to consider giving up **substance use**.

- **Keep track of your patterns of substance use** – be aware of when, what and where you last used. Remaining aware of your patterns of use can assist you in limiting yourself rather than using the substance excessively without realising or intending to do so.
- **Conduct a cost-benefit analysis** – Create a list of the costs and benefits of giving up the substance. This may assist you in motivating yourself to reduce your substance use, and can also pre-empt any challenges you may face during this period.
- **The important things** – Make a list of the important things in your life, such as your family, friends, interests and values. Think about how your decisions to use impacts on these areas.
- **Discuss with someone** – Talk to someone you know and trust about your substance use. This may be helpful for seeking a different perspective and additional support.
- **Recognise Barriers** – Know what may be stopping you from quitting or seeking help. Consider what it would take to overcome this obstacle so that you can you can begin to improve your quality of life.

2. Consider Treatment Options

The type of treatment sought depends on the type of substance you use. Consider all the available options in order to seek out what is likely to be most effective.

No single treatment works for everyone

Each treatment can work differently for different people. Find a treatment that feels right for you - do not be afraid to tell your practitioner if what they do is not helpful, or to try a different practitioner if you feel you cannot establish rapport with your current one. However, it is also important to stick with one option for a recommended time period before making a decision about whether it is helpful or not. Reducing substance abuse will almost always be an initially difficult and distressing process, so try to avoid making an assessment of a particular approach too early in the course of treatment.



Address more than your substance use

Treatment should not only look at your substance use, but should also examine how it affects your life and those around you, as well as how external factors contribute to you engaging in these patterns of use.

Commitment

Change will not happen quickly or immediately. Understand that treatment can take time and stay committed to your chosen path. Understand that setbacks are normal while remaining committed to your treatment.

Talk to your GP

Your GP will often be the gateway to various treatment options that are available for addressing patterns of substance abuse. It is important to consult with your GP so they can assist you in choosing the options that will best fit with you.

3. Seek Support

Treatment can be very difficult to undertake alone. Having a strong support group to help you through your treatment is important.

Family and Friends

Family and friends can be vital and beneficial supports in helping you through treatment. They can also provide encouragement at times when you need strength and support the most.

Sober network

If available, associate with others who have given up substance use. These people will understand your experience and can help you through the process of returning to a healthier lifestyle.

4. Healthy ways to cope with stress

Often those who abuse substances began because of life stressors. When giving up substance use, it is important to find other ways to deal with stress.

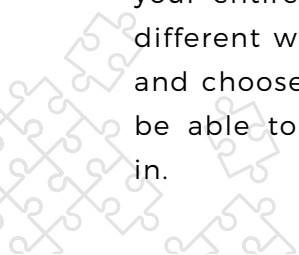
Exercise - Becoming active and exercising is a great way to relieve built-up stress, and it is also an effective way of releasing endorphins.

Outdoors - Try relaxing outdoors in the fresh air and warm sun – this is likely to improve your mood as connecting with nature often is enjoyable and relaxing.

Meditation - Meditation can help relax your entire body and mind. Research the different ways relaxation can be practiced and choose a method you believe you will be able to actively and regularly engage in.

Music - Music can help you relax. Take time for yourself and listen to your favourite music.

Social contact - Spending time around others, whether it involves engaging in a meaningful conversation, playing sport or watching a film with a group of friends, is generally a helpful way to enhance a sense of overall wellbeing and support. If you find that your social network leads you to feel worse about yourself or encourages you to engage in substance abuse, it may be worth re-evaluating who the most helpful social supports are for you at this time.



5. Triggers

When addressing substance abuse it is important to know what triggers are associated with the behaviour – what people, places and things are usually present when you are taking the substance? If these triggers are present, your brain often assumes that drug use will occur and makes biological shifts to prepare for it, which leads to increased cravings for the substance. Identifying what may trigger this response from your body is essential in assisting you to give up substance use, as avoiding these triggers initially can make abstinence easier.

- **Take a break from others who use the substance you are giving up** – for instance, often those who abuse drugs have built up a group of friends who also abuse drugs. During your treatment, try to separate from these people for a significant period of time so that you can stay on track and avoid their influence.
- **Avoid places where substance use is more prevalent** – bars and clubs can be a hot spot for drug and alcohol use. Try to avoid such places so that you are not tempted.
- **Caution** – If you have to take prescription drugs, make sure to follow the doctor's recommendations strictly. It may also be worth allowing another person in your support network to administer these drugs to you, depending on your situation.

6. A meaningful and substance-free life

Try to engage in more meaningful and enjoyable activities

Building a more meaningful and enjoyable lifestyle will help you to avoid relapse, as it can assist previous users in realising that they can have a richer and more vibrant life without using the substance.

Hobbies

Engage in a new and enjoyable hobby, try something new and creative, or something you used to do that you have given up.

Community

Get involved with your community. Volunteer, particularly at places that align with your values. Joining a local sports club can be another way of re-establishing community connections.

Set goals

Have something you wish to work towards in an area that you are passionate about or interested in. Set a goal that can be accomplished and think of ways to achieve it.

Relapse

Relapse is a normal part of substance abuse recovery. Understand that if you relapse, it is not the end of the world and does not need to set your back to square one. You can continue to abstain after a relapse has occurred, and it usually takes multiple attempts to quit successfully.

If you would like to seeking treatment from a psychologist for substance use, contact Strategic Psychology or book a session by visiting our website strategicpsychology.com.au