

Effects of Alcohol on Mental Health

By Anabel Feauto, Health Promotion Specialist

Alcohol and mental health are closely connected. There are many reasons why people may drink. It is incorporated into celebrations, socializing, commiserating, or coping with sorrows. The short-term mood enhancers and relaxation from alcohol may not lead to a misuse issue for some, however, for many people it can. This can turn into a vicious cycle of using alcohol as a coping mechanism and becoming dependent on the substance. Alcohol can play a role in the development and progression of a mental health condition.



Anabel Feauto

Research has shown that those who heavily drink are more likely to develop a mental health condition. An alcohol use disorder is defined as a recurrent use of the substance that causes clinically significant impairments such as, health problems, disability, and failure to meet major responsibilities at home, work, or school. It is not uncommon for people to have an addiction to alcohol and also a mental illness at the same time, referred to as a co-occurring disorder. According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 13.5 percent of young adults aged 18-25 had both a substance use disorder and any mental illness in the past year. If a co-occurring condition goes untreated, it is likely the symptoms of the mental health condition or alcohol misuse will get worse. Understanding how the impact of alcohol can negatively affect mental health is essential.

Those who experience significant alcohol issues are more likely to experience depression and anxiety. Similarly, individuals who experience depression and anxiety are frequently more likely to have alcohol use

issues. The relationship between a mental health challenge or condition and alcohol can be described as the following:

Depression and alcohol

If someone is experiencing depression, drinking may be a coping mechanism. This may have the short-term effect of making them feel better. However, becoming dependent on alcohol and using it as a coping mechanism can lead to a worsening of symptoms of depression.

Anxiety and alcohol

Alcohol can have a short-lived feeling of relaxation. If someone is experiencing anxiety, they may use alcohol as a coping mechanism to relax and then continue to drink more to have that feeling of relaxation. This can create a dependency to alcohol. Alcohol may also make anxiety worse with hangovers.

Suicide, self-harm, and alcohol

Heavy drinking can lead to suicidal thoughts and attempts. Because it can make people act more impulsive and lose inhibitions, alcohol may lead to actions such as self-harm or suicide.

There are other ways that alcohol can make mental health issues worse. Alcohol may interrupt sleep. Using alcohol can negatively impact sleeping patterns, which can increase fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Alcohol may interfere with medication. It can reduce the effectiveness of antidepressants and increase other side effects that can be dangerous such as drowsiness. Alcohol may increase risky behavior. Alcohol lowers inhibitions and can make people more likely to do things that they would not normally do.

If you are worried about how alcohol is impacting you or feel like it is affecting your mental health, there are numerous resources and help available. It is never too

early to address concerns, as an alcohol issue left untreated can get worse.

- Avoid situations where you may be tempted to drink. Think about other activities such as the movies or group classes in your community that don't offer alcohol.
- Reach out to someone you trust such as a family member or a friend. It can be helpful to have encouragement or to have offer support in finding treatment.
- Check online for resources on how to manage issues with alcohol.
- Reach out to anonymous national hotlines.
- Get connected to treatment options near you.

People who are struggling with alcohol misuse or a co-occurring disorder can recover. Because mental health challenges and substance misuse issues can co-occur, many alcohol misuse treatment centers offer skills and coping mechanisms for mental health challenges. If you are someone you love is struggling with alcohol misuse, please reach out and seek professional help.

Valeo's Recovery Center is located at 330 SW Oakley Avenue, Topeka KS 66606. Valeo's Recovery Center 24-Hour Detox Line is 785-234-3448.

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Crisis Services
400 SW Oakley
Topeka, KS 66606
24 Hour Crisis Line
785-234-3300

National Suicide Prevention Life Line

1-800-273-8255

Shawnee County Suicide Prevention Coalition

SCSPC.org

Family Service & Guidance Center (18 and under)

325 SW Frazier
Topeka, KS 66606
24 Hour Crisis Number
785-232-5005

Healing after Loss to Suicide Group (HeALS)

Sandy Reams – Group Facilitator
Topeka.Heals@gmail.com
785-249-3792