

The Genesis Therapy Center

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Alcohol Use During the Pandemic

David Barecki, Psy.D.

We are living in a very strange, unpredictable, and stressful time. The COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, social distancing, economic woes, and the political state of our nation have been a source of stress and anxiety for most people. Unfortunately, stress is one of the clear predictors of heavy drinking and can be a particular problem for people who rely on alcohol to cope with stress. To make matters worse, it is easy to rely on alcohol as a means of coping with stress and easy for drinking to become excessive given its ease of access and its prevalence in American culture.

Heavy alcohol use is associated with numerous health problems including heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, and substance use disorder. In addition, drinking is a problem if it causes trouble in your relationships, in school, in social activities, or in how you think and feel.

If you believe you may be drinking too much, there are several ways to help you cut down alcohol use:

Be Careful of Boredom, Stay Active

Perhaps now is the time to engage in that personal passion project or hobby you have been putting off. Use the time and money spent on drinking to do something fun with you family or friends. Go out to eat, see a movie, or play a game.

Know Your Temptations

Consider people, places, and times that make you drink, even if you do not want to. You do not have to drink when other people are drinking. Be aware of these triggers and plan ahead what you will do or say to avoid drinking when you are tempted. Do not drink when you are angry or upset or have a bad day. These are habits you need to break if you want to drink less.

Experiment With a Break from Alcohol

Pick a day or two each week when you will not drink at all. Then try for a week. Focus on how you feel physically and emotionally on those days. If you notice that you do in fact feel better when you drink less, it makes it all the much easier to cut down for good.

Get Support & Don't Give up

Be patient with yourself, change is not easy, and just don't give up. Try, try and try again. Remember to get support from the people around you who care about you. If you continue to struggle and believe you have a drinking problem, consult your personal health care provider. Other resources include the National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Referral Routing Service, available at 1-800-662-HELP. This service can provide you with information about treatment programs in your local community and allow you to speak with someone about alcohol problems.

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Minfulness; what is it?

Nicole Ramel, LCPC

Is it being more aware? Lying on the floor in the lotus position? Is it a state of mind or a change in behavior? Regardless of how you perceive the idea of mindfulness, it is something that can be practiced every day. In a study conducted by Harvard University, it was found that people spend 47 percent of their day thinking about the future; more so worrying about daily and weekly activities versus sitting and enjoying those activities. It's important to understand the balance in that you may need to plan for something but once you get there, you arrive fully with both mind and body.

Mindfulness involves being aware of how you feel in the moment; taking in all the sounds, sights, smells, tastes, etc. Even for a few moments, wouldn't it be nice to be free from worrying about what meal to cook next or what laundry to do? It may seem daunting to think about doing nothing for a few minutes, but here is where you begin to take small steps to practice "doing nothing," even if it's only for 5 minutes a day.

An easy way to start practicing mindfulness is to exercise the 5,4,3,2,1 method; 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. This exercise can help you become aware of your surroundings and ground you in the moment. Where can you do this? Anywhere really...outside, inside, in your car, office or home. Taking a few minutes a day to do this can help ease some of that anxiety and worry as well as center your mind and be able to refocus and start again.

Other mindfulness tools can be found on YouTube, books at your local libraries, or ask your therapist for ideas and suggestions of other activities! If it seems difficult at first, remember that with practice it will become easier. Take care and be compassionate to yourself!

Anyone interested in supporting our testing services may make a designated donation to The Genesis Therapy Center and make clear that the amount donated is to go towards providing an assessment service for a child or adolescent. For further information, please contact our Executive Director, Catherine Fairfield, at 708-535-7320, ext. 1110.

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