



# How alcohol can affect your mental health

South Tyneside  
Adult Recovery Service

Cookson House, River Drive, South Shields.  
Tel. 0191 917 1160

Alcohol, over time, can cause mental health problems, including depression and memory loss.

## Alcohol alters your brain chemistry

Alcohol is a depressant, which means it can affect our thoughts, feelings and actions – and sometimes long-term mental health.

The relaxed feeling you can get when you have that first drink is due to the **chemical changes alcohol has caused in your brain.**

A drink can help us feel more confident and less anxious. That's because it's starting to depress the part of the brain we associate with inhibition. But, as you drink, more of the brain is affected.

Alcohol can be linked to aggression and you could become angry, aggressive, anxious or depressed.

## Alcohol can increase anxiety

Unfortunately, reaching for a drink won't always have the effect you're after. While a glass of wine after a hard day might help you relax, in the long run it can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety and make stress harder to deal with.

- When you drink, your perception of a situation narrows and you don't always respond to all the cues around you.
- If you're prone to anxiety and notice something that could be interpreted as threatening in the environment, you could hone in on that and miss other less threatening or neutral information.
- For example, you might focus on your partner talking to someone you're jealous of, rather than notice all the other people they've chatted to that evening.

## Alcohol and depression

People who experience anxiety or depression are twice as likely to be heavy or problem drinkers. For some people, the anxiety or depression came first and they've reached for alcohol to try to relieve it. For others, drinking came first, so it may be a root cause of their anxieties.

## Addiction can harm relationships

Drinking heavily can also affect your relationships with your partner, family and friends. It can impact on your performance at work. These issues can also contribute to depression.

If you use drink to try and improve your mood or mask your depression,

you may be starting a vicious cycle. Warning signs that alcohol is affecting your mood include:

- Poor sleep after drinking
- Feeling tired because of a hangover
- Low mood
- Experiencing anxiety in situations where you would normally feel comfortable.



## Alcohol impacts your memory

Soon after drinking alcohol, your brain processes slow down and your memory can be impaired. That's why you can wake up the next day with a 'blank' about what you said or did and even where you were.

This short-term memory failure or 'black out' doesn't mean that brain cells have been damaged. However frequent heavy drinking sessions can damage the brain.

Drinking heavily over a long period of time can also have long-term effects on memory. Even on days when you don't drink any alcohol, recalling what you did yesterday, or even where you have been earlier that day, become difficult.

## Getting Help

**You should never abruptly stop drinking or rapidly reduce your units.**

Instead, seek advice from a GP or healthcare professional to gradually reduce your use of alcohol safely. Or contact South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service on [0191 917 1160](tel:01919171160).

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## South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service

**Call: 0191 917 1160**

### Accessing the service

We offer a range of free, confidential and non-judgemental services for individuals and their families whose lives are affected by drugs and/or alcohol, and who live within South Tyneside.

Our aim is to support people to stay safe and live happier, healthy lives, free from drugs and alcohol.