

Alcohol and COVID-19

Information for people who may be at risk of drinking too much

Many factors may make us more likely to drink alcohol during a crisis. Anxiety, isolation and stress are all common during this time of COVID-19. And unfortunately, science has shown us that one of the most powerful triggers for substance use is stress.

Reasons for drinking

People may drink more for many reasons during this period, including because of:

- loss of work
- fears about becoming ill
- financial stressors
- interpersonal strains from living in close quarters
- lack of structure (from reduced work hours or job loss)
- feeling a lack of purpose
- not having the same access we had pre-COVID to supports and care (e.g., 12-step groups, community treatment centres).

People tend to do better when they have structure to their days and feel a sense of purpose. Without these things, we may feel a sense of discomfort or unease, have problems sleeping and struggle with low self-esteem. We may also find that the lines between weekends and weekdays and between leisure and work become blurred. With many hours in the day to fill, boredom can take root. Some of us may end up drinking alcohol to pass the time.

Signs that your drinking may be a problem

Drinking can cause subtle changes in the brain that can creep up on you slowly. For example, you may start off drinking a bit each day as an enjoyable way to pass the time, but soon this routine turns into an activity that is less about providing pleasure than it is about bringing you relief. You may not even initially notice that your drinking is accompanied by a slight lowering of mood and disinterest in other things. More frequent thoughts of alcohol can eventually become a preoccupation.

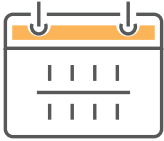
It is helpful to catch these signs early. All of us should be thinking about and watching our drinking — or cannabis use — in the same way that we monitor our nutrition.

This information sheet is not intended to be a resource for people who require screening for COVID-19 or who are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department.

For more information, visit www.camh.ca/covid19

Tips to moderate your drinking

Refrain from drinking for at least two days of each week.



Avoid daytime drinking.



Drink non-alcoholic drinks in between other drinks.



When you do drink, avoid having more than two drinks a day if you are a woman, or **three drinks a day** if you are a man.



Try not to pair alcohol with normal everyday activities such as watching TV, as these activities may be more difficult to “unpair” later and can lead to unhealthy routines.



Switch to a less potent type of alcohol (for example beer or wine instead of liquor) or buy a type of alcohol you like less so you are not as likely to drink too much.



Additional resources

Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines:
www.camh.ca/-/media/files/canadas-low-risk-guidelines-pdf.pdf

CAMH's Saying When app:
www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/introducing-the-saying-when-app

Alcoholics Anonymous: <http://aa-intergroup.org/directory.php>

SMART Recovery (which includes message boards, chat rooms, online meetings, and an online library of recovery resources):
www.smartrecovery.org/smart-recovery-toolbox/smart-recovery-online/