

Alcohol the Legal Drug

It is often difficult for patients to stop drinking when they enter treatment. Some of the reasons for this are:

1. Triggers for alcohol use are everywhere. It is sometimes hard to do anything social without facing people who are drinking.

Do you have friends who get together without drinking?

2. Many people use alcohol in response to internal triggers. Depression and anxiety seem to go away when they have a drink. It's difficult for people to realize that sometimes the alcohol causes the depression.

Does feeling a certain way make you want to have a drink?

3. If a person is addicted to an illicit drug and uses alcohol less often, alcohol may not be viewed as a problem. The problem isn't recognized until the person tries to stop drinking.

Have you been able to stop drinking since you entered treatment?

4. Alcohol affects the rational, thinking part of the brain. It is difficult to think reasonably about a drug that makes thinking clearly more difficult.

Have you ever been sober at a party and watched people drink and "get stupid"?

ALCOHOL THE LEGAL DRUG | *continued from other side*

5. Because alcohol dulls the rational brain, it promotes less controlled activity in the lower brain. This results in alcohol helping people become more sexual, less self-conscious and more social. When you are used to using alcohol to increase sexual pleasure and help you socialize, these activities feel uncomfortable without it.

Do you depend on alcohol for sexual or social reasons?

6. Many of us grow up using alcohol to mark special occasions. It is hard to learn how to celebrate those times without drinking.

What special occasions did your family celebrate with alcohol?

How do you celebrate now?

7. In many families and social groups, drinking is a sign of strength, of being with it, or of being sophisticated. Our culture encourages drinking.

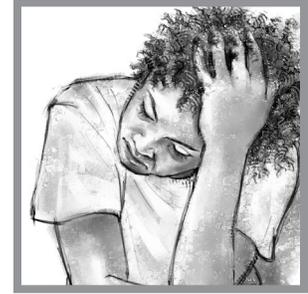
Do you feel less “with it” when you are not drinking?

8. The habit of drinking gets to be part of certain activities. It seems difficult, at first, to do those things without a beer or a drink. (e.g., eating certain kinds of foods, going to sporting activities, relaxing. etc.)

What activities seem to go with drinking for you?

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It is important to remember that everyone who stops drinking has these problems at first. As you work through the difficult situations and get more time sober, it does get easier.



Boredom

Often people who stop using drugs and alcohol say life feels boring. Some of the reasons for this feeling might be:

1. A structured, routine life feels different from an addict lifestyle.
2. Brain chemical changes during recovery can make people feel flat (or bored).
3. Drug and alcohol users often have huge emotional swings (high to low and back to high). Normal emotions can feel flat by comparison.

People with longer sobriety rarely complain of continual boredom, so these feelings do change. Meanwhile there are some ways to help reduce this feeling.

1. Review your recreational activity list. Have you started doing things that you enjoyed before using drugs and alcohol? Have you begun new activities that interest you?
2. Can you plan something to look forward to? How long has it been since you've taken a vacation?
3. Talk about this feeling with a mate or close friend. Does he or she feel bored too? Does he or she have any interesting suggestions?
4. Try going back to scheduling. Forcing yourself to write out daily activity helps you see where you can schedule in more interesting experiences.
5. Do something risky that will further your personal growth. Sometimes boredom results from not challenging yourself enough in your daily living.

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Which of the above might work for you? It is important to try new ways of fighting the bored feeling. Untreated it can be a trigger and move you toward relapse.



Work and Recovery

Do any of the following describe your situation?

- _____ 1. Employed in a demanding job making inpatient treatment impossible.
- _____ 2. Working in an unsatisfactory job; thinking of making a change.
- _____ 3. Working in a situation where recovery will be difficult.
- _____ 4. Working with a schedule that has to be changed to make treatment work.
- _____ 5. Unemployed and needing to find a job.

People in any of the above situations have to deal with certain problems that can make treatment more difficult. Some of the problems are outlined below and are listed with numbers corresponding to the list above.

1. People in this situation always have to look at priorities. Outpatient treatment may have been selected because work is a #1 priority. The problem is that treatment won't work unless it is given a 100 percent effort. That means that for awhile treatment has to take priority over work. Once longer-term sobriety has been achieved, the recovery can shift to maintenance intensity and work can again be a major focus.
2. It is a generally accepted fact that during recovery major changes (in jobs, in relationships, etc.) should be delayed for 6 months to 1 year, whenever possible. There are many reasons for this. Several of them are:
 - a. People in recovery go through large changes themselves and sometimes change their views on personal situations.
 - b. Any change is stressful and major stress is to be avoided as much as possible during recovery.
3. Some jobs lend themselves to recovery more than others. Work situations that are difficult to combine with outpatient treatment are:
 - a. Situations where it is necessary to be with other people who are drinking or using.
 - b. Jobs that make large sums of cash money available at unpredictable times.

WORK AND RECOVERY | *continued from other side*

4. There are jobs that require long or unusual hours. Often the very nature of the schedule has contributed to the drug or alcohol problem in the first place. The first task, if you have such a job, is to work with your therapist (and your boss or someone else at your job) to make your schedule work for your recovery. Without this initial intervention, your recovery will not stand a chance. Recovery is much too difficult a process unless it is your #1 priority while you are in treatment.

5. When people are out of work, treatment becomes more difficult because:
 - a. Looking for work is often a necessary priority.
 - b. Without blocks of time spent at work there is so much free time it is difficult to fill it and provide the structure that makes outpatient treatment effective.
 - c. Resources are often more limited, making transportation, childcare, and so forth more of a problem.

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There are no easy solutions to these problems. It is important to be aware of the issues so that you can plan to make your recovery as strong as possible.



Be Smart, Not Strong

“I can be around drugs or alcohol. I am certain I don’t want to use and once I make up my mind, I’m very strong.”

...

“I have been doing well and I think it’s time to test myself and see if I can be around friends who are using. It’s just a matter of willpower.”

...

“I think I can have a drink and not use speed. I never had a problem with alcohol anyway.”

Staying drug and alcohol free does not depend on strength. People who are able to maintain abstinence do it by being smart. They know that the key to not drinking and not using is to keep far away from relapse situations. The closer you get, the more likely a relapse becomes. If drugs or alcohol appear unexpectedly and you are close to them and to friends who are drinking and using, your chances of using are much greater than if you weren’t in that situation. Smart people stay sober by avoiding triggers for as long as possible.

DON’T BE STRONG. BE SMART.

How smart are you being? Rate how well you are doing in avoiding relapse:

	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
1. Practicing thought-stopping	1	2	3	4
2. Scheduling	1	2	3	4
3. Keeping appointments	1	2	3	4
4. Avoiding triggers	1	2	3	4
5. Not using alcohol	1	2	3	4
6. Not using drugs	1	2	3	4
7. Avoiding drug and alcohol users	1	2	3	4
8. Avoiding drug and alcohol places	1	2	3	4
9. Exercising	1	2	3	4
10. Being truthful	1	2	3	4
11. Going to 12-Step or other outside support meetings	1	2	3	4

Total Recovery I.Q. _____

