

Mind your mental health this winter



Winter can be a difficult season for many. Cold weather, lack of sunshine and dark mornings combined with the pressure of money worries after over-indulging at Christmas can all take their toll. Not to mention the added stress that COVID is contributing this year.

'Winter blues' can have a considerable impact on employee wellbeing and mental health. Hospital admissions caused by alcohol dependency and abuse over the festive season rise considerably along with other mental illnesses such as depression and suicidal thoughts.

Here we look at how to spot the signs of alcoholism and how to get help.



A focus on alcohol abuse and addiction



KEY FACT: Men and women are advised not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis

Alcohol addiction is a strong, often uncontrollable, desire to drink. Sufferers will often place alcohol above everything in their life including work, friends and even family. The signs can be hard to spot and often sufferers are in denial as they may build up a physical tolerance.

Alcoholism is different to 'harmful drinking' or alcohol abuse which is an occasional pattern of drinking which can cause damage to your health and your personal relationships and work. Christmas and New Year are notorious for an upturn in overindulgence and alcohol-related hospital admissions. However, it is important to recognise the signs of alcohol addiction so that help can be sought.

Spotting the signs

- A lack of interest in previously normal activities
- Appearing intoxicated more regularly
- Needing to drink more in order to achieve the same effects
- Appearing tired, unwell or irritable
- An inability to say no to alcohol
- Anxiety, depression or other mental health problems
- Becoming secretive or dishonest
- Blood vessels appear on the skin, looking like tiny red spider webs
- Swelling or redness on palms of the hands

- Redness of the face, especially the eyes and nose
- Sore or upset stomach that might be accompanied by heartburn
- Feeling clammy and sweating without reason
- Numbness and tingling in the hands and feet



Treating alcoholism

If you think you, or someone you know, may be drinking too much or that alcohol is beginning to have a damaging effect, Drinkaware offers an online alcohol self-assessment to establish if there is cause for concern and a need to seek further help from a GP.

A key first stage of treatment is detoxification which involves stopping drinking completely.



Ongoing treatments include medication to help abstain or reduce drinking and psychological and psychosocial treatments which involve counselling to help change attitudes towards drinking.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can also be offered to help change negative thought patterns and habits which lead to drinking.

Mutual help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous are widely available and free. Call their free helpline **0800 9177 650** for support or to find a local group.



Useful resources:

-  www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools/self-assessment
-  www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/AA-Meetings



Brighter days ahead

Here are some practical tips and general advice to help ward off the winter blues:

GET SOME EXERCISE: Even a brisk 10-minute walk can have a positive effect on mood. Physical activity plays a vital role in treating depression and anxiety.

EAT WELL: Improving your diet may give you more energy, clarity and positivity.

SLEEP TIME: Switch off electronic devices an hour before bedtime and aim for 8 hours sleep a night.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS: Reap the free rewards of fresh air and nature - walk the dog, do gardening, go for a jog or stroll during your lunch hour, ditch the car and take a bike instead... all great ways of fighting off the mood-dampening dark mornings and evenings.

AVOID EXCESSIVE DRINKING: It may seem like a quick fix but the answer is never at the bottom of the bottle and a hangover will make things seem worse.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS: Combat loneliness by joining an online evening class as a way of widening your social circle.

BE KIND: A brilliant mood enhancer for you and the recipient, whether it's baking a cake for an elderly neighbour or making that long overdue phone call. Everyone wins with kindness.

BE MINDFUL: Try yoga or meditation or even just living in the moment can help lift spirits and pause the stresses of a busy life.



The final word of support

Whether you or someone you know is suffering from alcohol addiction or anxiety, SAD or suicidal thoughts, remember there is always someone who can help. Always.

If life ever feels overwhelming, never suffer in silence. Speak to your GP or friends and family. They, and you, will always be glad you did.

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