

Your Health

 Health Partners

JANUARY 2024 NEWSLETTER



EMOTIONAL & HEALTH & ALCOHOL AWARENESS

plus tips on starting the new year right

In this issue of *Your Health*, we take a look at emotional health: what it means, how to spot signs of poor emotional health and what you can do to have and maintain good emotional health. With Christmas and New Year's behind us now, we also examine our relationship with alcohol and what we can all do to cut down on our drinking to have better overall health.

Emotional Health

We all know what mental health is, but what is emotional health and how is it different?

Emotional health and mental health are related but distinct concepts. Emotional health refers to the ability to manage and express emotions in a healthy way, such as being able to cope with stress, form positive relationships and maintain a positive outlook on life. Mental health, on the other hand, refers to a person's overall psychological well-being and includes factors such as their ability to think clearly, manage emotions and cope with daily stressors.

While emotional health is one component of mental health, mental health encompasses a broader range of factors that contribute to a person's overall psychological state.

We all have days when we feel low, stressed or just generally on edge. This is a natural part of being human and responding to difficult circumstances.

But how do we know when it's a tough time that will pass, or when it is part of our emotional health struggling? It can be easy to slip into the latter without realising.



“Sometimes depression can be triggered by a change in life circumstances.”

When we experience emotional distress or unease – either frequently or over a continuous period of time – we may be experiencing a mental health disorder, but we may simply be identifying with certain traits or symptoms.

Understanding some of the common mental health disorders can point us in the direction of help (either self-help or help from a professional) that is more specific to our personal struggles. So, let's start by looking at a few common types of emotional or mental health disorders.

DEPRESSION

You have probably heard of the term 'depression'. You may even have experienced a bout of depression or know someone who has. The primary emotion characterised by depression is low mood or sadness, which can manifest as lack of motivation, lethargy or lack of care or by negative thoughts about ourselves, others or life in general.

If you are considering whether you are depressed, it's good to remember that experiencing sadness is a natural response to loss. When we feel like this, it can easily lead to not doing anything, maybe even not getting out of bed. Sometimes depression can be triggered by a change in life circumstances or your role in life, or by a perceived failure or rejection.

STRESS

Another word we hear a lot is stress. If you are suffering from stress, you may feel overwhelmed or like there is an underlying

pressure or weight on top of you. You may notice your shoulders or back are tense, you have regular headaches, you feel on edge a lot of the time, you feel more tired than usual or experience symptoms of an irritable bowel.

You may find you are more impatient or snappy with the people around you or feel unable to keep up with tasks (either at work or home). It could be affecting your sleep or appetite/eating habits.

Stress can either be triggered by a big event or situation in your life or a build-up of smaller situations or pressures. Just know that we all experience stress our lives from time to time.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe.

We all feel anxious from time to time, and it is completely normal to worry or feel anxious about things such as exams, illness

or other things.

It really only becomes a disorder when it is so persistent or excessive it impacts on your ability to live normally.

For some people, persistent anxiety seems to impact their lives in many areas or seem disproportionate to others, and they may find it difficult to identify when they last felt relaxed. This can be a condition called Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD).

PANIC ATTACKS/PANIC DISORDER

You may have experienced more acute bursts of anxiety. During these times you may notice a quickened heart rate, feel like you can't breathe, feel like you have butterflies or a knot in your stomach, feel shaky or tingling/numbness in your hands or feet. It can feel like you are having a heart attack, losing control or that you will pass out.

You may have heard these referred to as panic attacks. Panic attacks can be



Four key areas that we can all focus on to maintain good health:



■ **SLEEP:** Anyone who is a parent or shift worker will know firsthand the impact of not enough sleep. Getting enough sleep can have a huge positive influence on how we feel. Consider whether in your current life circumstances you can have a regular sleep routine: when possible, going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. If this isn't possible, try to have a routine in what you do before bed to prime your body so it is ready to sleep.



■ **DIET:** We all need fuel to keep going. Making sure we eat a good balance of different types of food helps to give us the energy and nutrients we need to feel healthy. Most of us tend to either comfort eat or lose our appetite when we are stressed, anxious or have low mood. Know yourself, if you have a stressor (at work or home), then have a plan in place to ensure you keep eating what you know you need during that time.



■ **EXERCISE:** Keeping active benefits our mood and energy levels. This will look different for each of us, depending on physical ability and life circumstances. If you aren't someone who regularly exercises, then consider how you can increase your physical activity. This may mean walking somewhere you usually drive, choosing to take the stairs instead of the lift, adding in an exercise class or joining a gym. The trick is to be honest with yourself about what is realistic. When we set unrealistic goals in terms of exercise, we rarely stick to them!



■ **HYDRATION:** Not drinking enough liquid can make us feel lethargic and low in energy, or even dizzy or lightheaded. Good hydration is one of the most important aspects of our diet. Drinking water or other hydrating drinks, and eating food with high water content, is a simple way to keep our bodies healthy.

triggered by traumatic experiences, situations that feel scary or feel like they come out of the blue for no apparent reason. If you don't know what is happening this experience can be very scary.

When this happens, people may be diagnosed with panic disorder. Knowing what is happening for many people can help to reduce the intensity of further anxiety episodes.

GETTING HELP

If you identify with any of the above descriptions, there is plenty of help available for you. The option available will depend on how these difficulties are affecting your day-to-day life.

If you identify with some of the descriptions above, but life and work still feel 'normal' and manageable, you could consider self-help options initially.

Several NHS trusts have self-help leaflets on their websites, and Mind charity is a great resource for guidance, information and support, so you can always start with a search online.

If you feel that your ability to manage things in life is slipping, then counselling or talking therapy may be good option for you. There may be instant access to talking therapies for you via an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) service at your workplace, via your local GP or your occupational health team.

If you are feeling completely overwhelmed or if you feel like giving up, then you need more immediate support.

You should never feel alone as help is always available – you can call the Samaritans (116 123) at any time day or night, you can ring 999 or you can make an emergency appointment with your GP.

COPING

It can be helpful to notice what activities or which people in your life help to improve your mood, even a little bit. We are all unique individuals, so this will look different for us all.



“If you can, make an active decision to seek out the people and things that give you joy or peace...”


Be aware of your own patterns and responses. What helps you to feel energised or calm? If we have low mood or feel anxious or stressed, we can end up only doing the things we need to do and putting off everything else, including things we enjoy.

It's so easy to choose what we do or don't do based on how we feel – but this can keep us trapped in a cycle of low mood and lack of motivation.

So, if you can, make an active decision to seek out the people and things that give you joy or peace or make you feel good about yourself.

You've probably heard the phrase “prevention is better than cure”. This is an important principle in mental health and emotional wellbeing.

There are many things you can do to help prevent deterioration in mental health in addition to what activities you do to improve mood (as discussed above).

Our physical and emotional/mental health work together. This means when we care for our physical body, we are helping to maintain a healthy mental and emotional state. 

Sources

For more information about emotional and mental health disorders you can look at www.mind.org.uk



The short-term risks of alcohol misuse include:

- Accidents and injuries requiring hospital treatment, such as a head injury;
- Violent behaviour and being a victim of violence;
- Unprotected sex that could potentially lead to unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- Loss of personal possessions, such as wallets, keys or mobile phones;
- Alcohol poisoning – this may lead to vomiting, fits (seizures) and falling unconscious;
- People who binge drink (drink heavily over a short period of time) are more likely to behave recklessly and are at greater risk of being in an accident.

- Bowel cancer;
- Mouth cancer;
- Breast cancer;
- Pancreatitis;
- Damage to the brain, which can lead to problems with thinking and memory.

As well as causing serious health problems, long-term alcohol misuse can lead to social problems for some people, such as unemployment, divorce, domestic abuse and homelessness.

When you cut down on your alcohol consumption, some of the immediate effects can include:

- Feeling better in the mornings;
- Being less tired during the day;
- Better looking skin;
- Feeling more energetic;
- Better weight management.

Persistent alcohol misuse increases your risk of serious health conditions, including:

- Heart disease;
- Stroke;
- Liver disease;
- Liver cancer;

Alcohol Awareness – starting anew in 2024

With the winter holidays now come and gone, you may be looking to reassess your relationship with alcohol. Has your drinking caused any problems in the past month or year? Is it affecting your physical or mental health? Is it becoming more important than being with people or holding down your job?

January is a great time to review your drinking, so let's get back to basics.

What is alcohol and what harm can it do?

Alcohol is a psychoactive substance with dependence-producing properties that has been widely used in many cultures for centuries. The harmful use of alcohol

causes a high burden of disease and has significant social and economic consequences.

The harmful use of alcohol can also result in damage to other people, such as family members, friends, co-workers and strangers.

Alcohol consumption is a causal factor in more than 200 diseases, injuries and other health conditions. Drinking alcohol is associated with a risk of developing health problems such as mental and behavioural disorders, including alcohol dependence and major noncommunicable diseases such as liver cirrhosis, some cancers and cardiovascular diseases.





TIPS FOR CUTTING DOWN

If you regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week, or if you would simply like to reduce your drinking, try these simple tips to help you cut down.

- **Make a plan:** Before you start drinking, set a limit on how much you're going to drink.
- **Set a budget:** Only take a fixed amount of money to spend on alcohol.
- **Let them know:** If you let your friends and family know you're cutting down and it's important to you, you could get support from them.
- **Take it a day at a time:** Cut back a little each day. That way, every day you do is a success.
- **Make it a smaller one:** You can still enjoy a drink but go for smaller sizes. Try bottled beer instead of pints, or a small glass of wine instead of a large one.
- **Have a lower-strength drink:** Cut down the alcohol by swapping strong beers or wines for ones with a lower strength (ABV in %). You'll find this information on the bottle.
- **Try a non-alcoholic version of your favourite tippie:** There are more cropping up all the time – not just beers and lagers, but non-alcoholic spirits, too. Some are even so good you cannot tell the difference, aside from the positives of a better sleep and no hangover!
- **Stay hydrated:** Have a glass of water before you have alcohol, and alternate alcoholic drinks with water or other non-alcoholic drinks.
- **Take a break:** Have several drink-free days each week.

Long-term benefits can include:

- Improved mood (strong link with heavy drinking and depression);
- Better sleep;
- Improved judgement and behaviour;
- Better heart health;
- Improved immune system.

How much is too much?

Alcohol misuse is when you drink in a way that's harmful or when you're dependent on alcohol. To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level, people are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week.

A unit of alcohol is 8g or 10ml of pure alcohol, which is about:

- Half a pint of lower to normal-strength lager/beer/cider (ABV 3.6%);
- A single small shot measure (25ml) of spirits (25ml, ABV 40%);
- A small glass (125ml, ABV 12%) of wine contains about 1.5 units of alcohol.

You could be misusing alcohol if:

- You feel you should cut down on your drinking;
- Other people have been criticising your drinking;

- You feel guilty or bad about your drinking;
 - You need a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover.
- Someone you know may be misusing alcohol if:
- They regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week;
 - They're sometimes unable to remember what happened the night before because of their drinking;
 - They fail to do what was expected of them as a result of their drinking (for example, missing an appointment or work because they're drunk or hungover).

Here are two recipes for mocktails that won't make you feel left out

Grapefruit Paloma Mocktail
Refreshing and effervescent

Traditional Palomas are usually made with grapefruit-flavoured soda, lime juice and tequila, then served over ice.

This non-alcoholic version combines fresh grapefruit juice, lime juice and sparkling water, to make a refreshing mocktail. Instead of sweetened soda, this drink uses a touch of real maple syrup to sweeten things up a bit.

This recipe is naturally gluten-free, Paleo compliant and vegan. Make one (or three!), and sip away!

INGREDIENTS:

Grapefruit juice: You can use fresh-squeezed grapefruit juice or cold-pressed bottled juice. If you go with bottled juice, check the ingredients list to make sure that there are no additives or extra ingredients. The only ingredient should be grapefruit juice.

Lime juice: The combination of grapefruit and lime works very well. As with the grapefruit juice, use freshly squeezed or cold-pressed juice for the best results.

Maple syrup: This works as the perfect sweetener! Maple syrup easily dissolves in cold liquids which makes it the best choice for this drink. You can substitute with honey or agave syrup— just don't use too much.

Sparkling water: Feel free to use plain sparkling water or you can kick things up a notch and use your favourite grapefruit or lime sparkling water.

METHOD:

Step One: Add the grapefruit juice, lime juice, and maple syrup to a glass and stir until well combined.

Step Two: Fill the glass with ice.

Step Three: Top of the glass with sparkling water, stir to combine, and serve with a slice of lime and fresh grapefruit. You can add in some fresh herbs, such as a sprig of rosemary, as a garnish if you'd like.



'Sober' Sangria:

Fabulously fruity and festive

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups pear juice
- 2 cups sparkling water
- 2 pears
- 2 apples
- 2 oranges
- 1 pomegranate
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 3 star anises
- 6 slices of ginger
- 1 tsp peppercorns
- 5 cloves

METHOD:

1. Slice the pears, apples and oranges into 3mm slices or chunks as big as you like.
2. Remove seeds from the pomegranate.
3. Place all fruit, cinnamon sticks, star anises, ginger, peppercorns and cloves in a big bowl or jar and pour over pear juice.
4. Keep in the fridge for at least five hours.
5. Before serving, add cold sparkling water.

“Dependent drinking usually affects a person's quality of life.”

Dependent drinking

If someone loses control over their drinking and has an excessive desire to drink, it's known as dependent drinking (alcoholism). Dependent drinking usually affects a person's quality of life and relationships, but they may not always find it easy to see or accept this.

Severely dependent drinkers are often able to tolerate very high levels of alcohol in amounts that would dangerously affect or even kill some people. A dependent drinker usually experiences physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms if they suddenly cut down or stop drinking, including:

- Hand tremors – "the shakes";
- Sweating;
- Seeing things that are not real (visual hallucinations);
- Depression;
- Anxiety;
- Difficulty sleeping (insomnia).

This often leads to "relief drinking" to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

To keep your risk of alcohol-related harm low:

- People are advised not to drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week on a regular basis;
- If you drink as much as 14 units a week, it's best to spread this evenly over 3 or more days;
- If you're trying to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink, it's a good idea to have several alcohol-free days each week;
- If you're pregnant or trying to become pregnant, the safest approach is to not drink alcohol at all to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.



Regular or frequent drinking means drinking alcohol most days and weeks. The risk to your health is increased by drinking any amount of alcohol on a regular basis. (YH)

Getting help

If you're concerned about your drinking or someone else's, a good first step is to see a GP. They'll be able to discuss the services and treatments available.

Other resources:

- Alcoholics Anonymous: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/
- Alcohol Change: alcoholchange.org.uk/
- Al-Anon Family Groups al-anonuk.org.uk/

Sources

World Health Organisation (www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol), NHS (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/>)

NEXT ISSUE:

- Heart Health
- Cancer Awareness
- Alternative Therapies

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Our thinking is innovative. We constantly develop new responses and tools designed to address the health and wellbeing challenges that face your business and people.

Our commitment is total. We invest in our services, creating new ones and keeping in step with every client. We constantly explore new ways of working and make no compromises in the quality of our services.

Simply put, we are here to help people be their best.