

THINKING ABOUT DRINKING: Risky Drinking, Alcohol Use Disorder, and What You Can Do

THE WAY PEOPLE DRINK CAN BE DESCRIBED ON A SPECTRUM.



Signs of risky drinking: Drinking most days, getting into fights or accidents while drinking, not sleeping well after drinking, getting hangovers often.

Signs of AUD: Having trouble controlling drinking, drinking even when you know it's harming you, spending a lot of time drinking and recovering from drinking, feel strong cravings to drink.

If any of these signs are familiar to you, **you're not alone**—lots of people struggle with their drinking. It can be very hard to accept that your drinking is causing problems, but help is available. Everyone deserves care, and there's no reason to be ashamed.

HOW DRINKING CAN BECOME A PROBLEM

In addition to the short-term consequences that can come from drinking, like hangovers, fights, or injuries, alcohol can have effects on your health over time. People can also develop **alcohol use disorder (AUD)**, a condition in which someone has trouble stopping drinking even though they know that it's harming them. There are lots of reasons why this might happen, but it's especially common for people who have had **traumatic experiences** or who have a **family history** of addiction.

MAKING A CHANGE

Not everyone needs or wants to change their drinking. Some people may be thinking about making changes but not be ready. It's normal for people's goals to change over time. If you're interested in changing or stopping your drinking, you have many options! There's no one right way to make a change, and you can talk to people you trust, like family, friends, or a health care provider, to help you decide what would be best for you.

YOUR OPTIONS

Harm reduction is about finding ways to lower the risk of harm (1). For drinking, this might mean having fewer drinks per day, drinking fewer days per week, or drinking with others rather than drinking alone. There are apps you can use to help you set goals and change your drinking habits.

Mental health treatment can be helpful for people who drink to cope with depression, anxiety, trauma, or suicidal feelings. It's common for people to drink when they're feeling sad or anxious, but drinking actually does more harm to our mental health over time (2). The Connex Ontario website (connexontario.ca/en-ca) can help you find mental health services near you.

Withdrawal management ("detox") is an important step for people who get withdrawal symptoms (like sweating, shaking, or nausea) when they stop drinking. **It can be very dangerous to go through withdrawal by yourself.** Your health care provider can arrange a planned withdrawal, where you get support and medications for your symptoms until your withdrawal is over (3).

Anti-craving medications are safe and effective medicines that can help you meet your drinking goals. The most common anti-craving medications are naltrexone, acamprosate, and gabapentin. Which medication to take depends on your drinking goals, other medications you're taking, and medical conditions you have. Your health care provider can help you decide which one would be best for you (4).

Peer support can be an important way to connect with people who understand what you're going through. Most people have heard of Alcoholics Anonymous, but many places also have local organizations that offer online and in-person peer support options. You can try different groups until you find one that feels right.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

No matter what your drinking goals are, it's important to try to take care of yourself. This isn't always easy, but small steps matter! Here are some ideas of ways to practice self-care:

- Practice deep breathing and mindfulness (focus on right now, on purpose, without judgment). There are lots of smartphone mindfulness apps.
- Drink plenty of water and eat regular meals.
- Get moving safely and keep busy with a physical activity you enjoy, such as a brisk walk, running, swimming, biking, dancing, lifting weights, etc.
- Being **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired (HALT)** makes it harder to make good decisions. Try to avoid situations that make you vulnerable. Listen to your body and give yourself what you need.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

If you're feeling overwhelmed or scared, try to remember that you're not alone. If you're not sure what to do next, going to a rapid access addiction medicine (**RAAM**) clinic might be a good step (5).

LOCAL RESOURCES:

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_____	_____
_____	_____



1. Harm reduction tips



2. More about alcohol and mood



3. More about withdrawal management



4. More about anti-craving medications



5. metaphi.ca/raam-clinics/