



Alcohol: Use vs. abuse

The occasional drink may actually be good for us. Three to five alcoholic drinks a week has been shown to reduce our risk of developing heart disease and stroke and possibly diabetes. However, regularly drinking too much is not good for our physical or mental health and can lead to many negative consequences, including:

- Legal issues
- Financial concerns
- Relationship difficulties
- Work problems

Alcohol and your brain

Alcohol interferes with the communication pathways in our brains, causing memory lapses, changes in behaviour, loss of coordination, mood swings and an inability to think clearly. The more we consume, the greater the impairment. If we drink enough, we can lose control of these functions completely and lose consciousness or even die.

Alcohol abuse can lead to a number of long-term mental health issues, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Learning and memory problems
- Dementia

Alcohol and your body

Alcohol abuse can also result in very serious physical issues such as

- Liver disease
- Certain cancers
- Pancreatitis

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- Heart muscle damage (alcoholic cardiomyopathy) leading to heart failure
- Stroke
- High blood pressure

When does alcohol use become abuse?

How do you know if you or someone you love is developing a drinking problem? Here are some signs:

- Personality changes when drinking
- Guilt and shame about drinking or behaviours when drinking
- Hiding drinking habits
- Drinking to feel better or cope with social situations
- Black outs – having no memory of what happened while drinking
- Finding it hard to stop after one or two drinks or ending up drunk
- Drinking is having a negative impact on work, relationships or finances
- People are expressing concerns

If you are struggling with alcohol or are worried about someone you love, reach out for help. **Contact us** for information, support and local resources.

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Am I becoming my parents?

Even if we have wonderful relationships with our parents, the thought of turning into them can strike fear in our hearts. But the older we get, the more we catch ourselves saying and doing things our parents said and did.

Early days

During early childhood, our brains become programmed by those caring for us – in most cases, our parents. Through them we learn how to interact with the world. As our brains develop, neuropathways are formed – pathways we automatically take in certain situations. This is why we catch ourselves sounding like our mothers or acting like our fathers – which is great if we're mirroring positive traits, not so great if they're negative ones.

Forging new paths

It is possible to change negative or destructive behaviours we learned as children. Here are some ways to begin forging a new path in life:

- **Make peace with the past.** This doesn't mean the past never happened, it means understanding and forgiving your parents and recognizing their good qualities. It also means realizing that your mother or father's less than perfect parenting was learned from *their* parents.
- **Make a list** of your parents' characteristics or behaviours you want to avoid as well as a list of positive values for yourself.
- **Recognize your individuality.** People may say you're just like your mother or father, but you're not. You are your own person. Think about the things that make you unique. Whether it's your sense of humour, your artistic talent or ability to make friends, celebrate these differences.
- **Recognize that you've also inherited or learned positive things from your parents.** It's not so bad turning into your parents when you realize that they are responsible for many of your great qualities, such as strong work ethic or athleticism. It also helps to maintain – or develop – a close relationship across generations.
- **Ask your friends or relatives** to help you become more aware of how you react in certain situations.

If you feel completely helpless in identifying and changing your own behaviour, consider seeking professional help. **Contact us** for more information.

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