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Tips for Wellbeing No 10

Alcohol or Other Drugs

Thinking about making a change?

Why do people use alcohol or other drugs?

People use alcohol or other drugs for a range of reasons. Generally, taking the substance meets some short term need, e.g. increasing pleasure, having energy, to sleep, to feel/act more confidently, to meet needs for social connection, to avoid difficult problems or to decrease emotional or physical pain.

What is a substance use problem?

Using substances can lead to a range of problems depending on; the substance, the amount, how it is taken, how often it is taken, and what you do while under the influence of it. Common problems can include difficulties with mood, sleep, memory, concentration, health, finances, relationships or meeting responsibilities. People usually realise that their use has become problematic when the harm or risk in using starts to overtake the benefits.

Do you need to do something about it?

Take some time to reflect, and write down the short and long term positives and negatives you experience. Sometimes there is a range of problems involved, such as arguments with those you care about, difficulties with sleep, feeling depressed, trouble keeping up at work or feeling anxious or agitated. After doing this thoroughly, consider whether you have some reasons for change.

What can be done about it?

If you are ready to make a change, choose whether you wish to cut down or stop completely.

If you choose to stop

- > Don't postpone things, decide on a date to stop (and stop then).
- > Declare publicly your intention to stop-this helps to follow through on your commitment.
- > Access supports, see your GP, counsellor, support worker etc. Be aware that withdrawing from alcohol or other drugs may have serious health implications. Seek medical advice.
- > Stay away from the cues and triggers which remind you of the substance.
- > Identify and problem-solve high risk situations.

If you choose to reduce

- > Set your goals, e.g. only drink with others, when calm (not stressed), and limit the amount.
- > Never buy more (or have more available) than the amount you plan to use in one go.
- > Keep track of your use; keep a diary to accurately track how you are going.
- > Have regular non-use days in each week.

Coping with Cravings

Resist acting on the urges, the cravings (and your urge to use) will come and go in waves. Don't sit thinking about the substance while you are having cravings, instead do something that reminds you of your reasons for change. Write a letter, take a walk, phone a friend, or you could make a list of positives and negatives about your use (to remind you of why you have chosen to make a change). Or do something else, engage in a chore or practice a hobby. Coach yourself through the cravings, tell yourself (out loud if needed) that cravings are temporary feelings that will come and go. Talk yourself through the consequences and the problems you will have if you start using again.

General Tips

- > Make sure you have a healthy diet, get enough rest and sleep. Have a regular exercise routine e.g. walking, yoga, or working out at the gym.
- > Reward yourself for progress; don't give up (even if you have a bad day)!
- > Have a polite and definite 'no thanks' ready. Practice saying it in a range of ways e.g. 'No thanks, not tonight', 'No thanks, I'm cutting down', or 'Sorry...doctor's orders'.
- > Get involved in other activities and develop alternative ways to cope and meet your needs.
- > Keep going over your reasons for wanting to stop or cut down. Remind yourself frequently what led you to want to make changes-and what positive things this will lead to in the future.

For further reference

Services:

- > ACT Health Drug and Alcohol Service 24 hour helpline-(02) 6207 9977
- > Directions ACT directionsact.com
- > 24 hour drug and alcohol Information and online counselling, run by Turning Point-
counsellingonline.org.au

Resources:

- > *Self Help Strategies: For cutting down or stopping substance use-World Health Organisation 2010*
who.int/substance_abuse/publications/assist_self_help/

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