

Don't Self-Medicate with Alcohol or Drugs

Objective

To stop self-medicating with alcohol and drugs.

You Should Know

When you are feeling depressed and hopeless it is easy to turn to alcohol or drugs to self-medicate. Alcohol and drugs will temporarily numb your feelings; however, these substances obviously affect your thinking and judgement. When alcohol and drug use are used as a “crutch” to deal with an unhappy marriage, or stressful work or school environment, or financial difficulties, these substances magnify your problems and are likely to lead you deeper into despair.

Alcohol and drugs can contribute to actions, including suicide attempts, which you would not do if you were sober. According to the website QuitAlcohol.com, if you drink alcohol during periods of depression you are 120 times more likely to commit suicide.

Alcohol and drugs also contribute to the underlying causes of your depression. When people drink or take drugs, they may do things that they are ashamed of when they are sober again, and they can feel overwhelmed by guilt. The excessive use of alcohol or drugs also decreases self-esteem and contributes to social isolation, two other factors that can contribute to suicidal thoughts.

What to Do

There is no simple answer to breaking the chain between depression, alcohol and drugs, and suicidal thoughts and actions. If you drink or take drugs excessively, you should certainly be involved in therapy or support programs to help you with these problems. One resource for finding help is the Treatment Centers Directory: <http://www.treatmentcentersdirectory.com/>.

In the short-term, with the primary objective of keeping you safe, you should commit yourself to not using alcohol and drugs as a means of self-medicating. In other words, avoid alcohol and drugs when you are feeling upset – depressed, ashamed, guilty, angry, and so on.

The first step is to become aware when you are doing this potentially dangerous behavior. Use the following chart each time you reach for a drink or a drug because you are upset.

Reflections on This Exercise

Have you tried doctor-prescribed medications for your depression or other upsetting feelings?

What has been the outcome of using these medications?

Is there someone you can call whenever you think about using alcohol or drugs to self-medicate? Let them know you would like to do this and write their response below.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
