

Help yourself approach - The best approach

The most important step for a person consuming too much alcohol is to accept the problem of excess consumption and understand its nature. The next steps are to seek help from others as much as possible, and abide with the treatment programme.

There are some things that a person himself/herself can do to reduce the quantity of alcohol consumption. But this requires a lot of will power to change. Also, a supportive family or community can be of great help.

Once a person has recognized that his/her alcohol consumption is a problem and is determined to cut down the consumption, or give it up completely, he/she should attempt to identify the reasons for changing alcohol consumption patterns. Identifying the reason further motivates people to change their habits.

Identify reasons for changing...

Thinking about reasons for changing is an important first step. It will help to motivate you. First think carefully about your reasons for wanting to change. Then have a look at the list below and mark those that apply to you. If you have other reasons, write and discuss them with your doctor and/or counsellor.

- | You will feel better.
- | You will have more energy.
- | You will lose excess weight.
- | You will sleep better.
- | You will save money.
- | You won't have any hangovers.
- | You will work better.
- | Your performance at work will improve.
- | Your health will improve.
- | Your family life will improve.
- | Your memory will improve.
- | There will be less conflict at home.

Help yourself

Accept the problem

- | Be willing to understand the nature of your alcohol use problem
- | Reach out for help or at least accept help when it is offered
- | Adhere to treatment plan and remain compliant to treatment advice
- | Maintain regular follow up and contact with treating team
- | Seek help early in case of relapse.
- | You won't be thinking about your next drink all the time.
- | You will prevent serious health problems.

It is not easy to give up a habit of excess alcohol consumption. Continued motivation, determination and social support are required. Every little success must be appreciated and every failure handled with courage and support, rather than criticism from family members and the community.

Stick to your goals....

As mentioned before, there may be times when you will find it difficult to stick to your goals. You might find that you had a few more drinks than you had planned to drink. Do not get discouraged - do not think of yourself as a failure. Learn from each occasion. Keep on trying.

Remember...

- | Do not give in because you have had one or more bad experiences with trying to quit.
- | Take it one day at a time and gradually it will get easier.
- | You need your family and friends to support you.
- | Every time you stop yourself from doing something which is a habit, you are one step closer to breaking the habit.
- | The craving for alcohol will go if you mentally occupy yourself with something else.
- | You should consult your physician and/or counsellor concerning your difficulties.

Continued introspection and an honest self-appraisal is crucial for the perpetuation of motivation to stay on track with quitting alcohol.

How to reduce your drinking...

- | Quench your thirst with non-alcoholic drinks before having an alcoholic drink and between each alcoholic drink.
- | Eat before drinking; it will make you feel more full and then you will drink less.
- | Avoid salty snacks when you are drinking, it stimulates thirst.
- | Try to take small sips of your drink, avoid gulping, and if possible use a straw.
- | Dilute your drinks, e.g. add soda to wine and mixers to spirits.
- | Switch to low alcohol drinks.
- | Keep track of the amount of alcohol consumed.
- | Delay the time of day that you start drinking.
- | Decide on non-drinking days (2 days or more per week).
- | Turn to family and/or friends for support.
- | Engage in alternative activities at times that you would normally drink, e.g. when you are feeling bored or stressed.
- | Join a support group.
- | Avoid or reduce time spent with heavy-drinking friends.
- | Avoid bars, cafes or former drinking places.

Review progress: Are you keeping on track?

Questions to ask

- | Am I keeping to my goals?
- | What are the difficult times?
- | Am I losing motivation?
- | Do I need more help? Progress tips?
- | Every week record how much you drank over the week.
- | Avoid these difficult situations or plan activities to help you cope with them.
- | Think back to your original reasons for cutting down or stopping.
- | Come back for help, talk to family and friends.

Dealing with difficult times

Changing habits like drinking can be difficult. There will be times when you may drink more than what you have planned or there might be times when it is very difficult not to drink or limit your drinking.

Can you think of any difficult times when you had problems in controlling your drinking?

- | Where were you?
- | Who were you with?
- | What were you doing?
- | What were you feeling?

However, in the long-term, avoiding difficult situations may not be practical, so it is also important to work out strategies to cope with difficult situations. Take a look at some of the strategies below and mark those that would be useful to you.

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| If you have the habit of going to pubs after work or meeting your friends there... | ä | <i>Try to organize a different social activity, e.g. going to see a film, or going to a gym or a park.</i> |
| If you drink mainly at night... | ä | <i>Try to keep yourself busy, go to places where you cannot drink, e.g. movies.</i> |
| If you drink when you are with friends who drink heavily... | ä | <i>Try to avoid contact with these friends.</i> |
| If you drink when you are alone... | ä | <i>Reduce the amount of time that you spend alone, e.g. join a club or a support group or increase time doing activities with family members</i> |
| If you drink when you are bored... | ä | <i>Try to plan enjoyable activities, e.g. shows, movies, exercise, hobbies etc.</i> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you drink when you are stressed... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ä <i>Learn relaxation techniques or engage in relaxing activities, e.g. gardening.</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you drink when you feel depressed or if you think that drinking calms your anxiety... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ä <i>You must consult your doctor about it.</i> |

Now look at the list below. Mark the situations or feelings that tend to make you drink more. If you have other similar situations, write them below. Then discuss your list with your physician, counsellor, family member or a close friend.

- | When I go to a party.
- | When I go to dinner.
- | When I go to the pub.
- | Meeting people in social situations.
- | When I am with friends who drink.
- | When I am on my own.
- | When I am feeling in a low mood.
- | When I am feeling anxious.
- | When I am feeling angry.
- | When I am feeling stressed.
- | When I want to relax.
- | When I have had a difficult day.
- | When I have had an argument.
- | When I am in a celebrating mood.
- | When I invite friends over.

Now you have the list of the most difficult times for you to resist drinking. If it is at all possible, avoiding difficult situations will be very useful. Your initial strategy should be to reduce the temptation to drink.

Join a self-help group

This approach essentially is the coming together of people with similar problems to form voluntary, small groups for mutual help. This group approach started with the formation of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1935, by two alcohol-dependent people in Europe, one of them being a physician. The AA movement has been one of the most influential avenues for seeking help for people with alcohol use problems and their family members.

Ideology of Alcoholics Anonymous...

AA views alcoholism as a spiritual illness and drinking as a symptom of that illness.

The central spiritual defect in 'alcoholics' is described as an excessive preoccupation with self. Treatment of the preoccupation with self is the core of AA's approach.

The theory of AA is that addiction is not a property of the drugs (alcohol) but a characteristic of the addict 'being powerless over drugs'.

Indeed an 'addict' remains an addict (termed as recovering addict) even when not using drugs.

Abstinence is the primary goal but the ultimate goal is the transformation of an 'alcoholic' into the 'type' of person who does not drink.

'Emotional sobriety', rather than mere physical sobriety, is the goal.

The dynamics (mechanism of effectiveness) of AA

There are many dynamic processes which are presumed to be contributing towards the effectiveness of AA. These are:

1. AA offers a non-judgmental setting, with unconditional acceptance of a person with alcohol-related problems, without inducing any guilt in him.
2. The simple steps advocated by AA provide a concrete, tangible course of action. Working through these steps triggers a mental process previously unformed, unfocused or abandoned, and it may encapsulate powerful dynamics capable of having an impact on craving, conditioning and character.
3. Many elements of group therapy can be found operating in the group process at AA meetings. These are hope instillation by associating with sobriety maintaining recovering persons, imitation of recovering persons, universality due to mutual sharing of experiences, information through conversation and group discussions, the opportunity to talk about one's own experiences, learning of social skills and cohesiveness.

The efficacy of the group depends on the retention of members and the extent of participation at AA meetings. AA involvement is associated with a more stable social adjustment, more active religious life, internal locus at control and better employment adjustment.

The widespread popularity of AA and the other self-help groups the world over in itself is an indication of the benefit they provide. Innumerable individual accounts and collective impressions have been documented about the efficacy of these approaches. However, systematic outcome evaluation studies have not been conducted. AA and other groups have become sensitive to the need for a systematic evaluation and therefore some collaborative research is ongoing. Despite the lack of conclusive scientific

evidence to support its efficacy, clinical experience does suggest that participation in self-help groups can be an important adjunct to treatment for better outcome in many patients with substance use problems.

The 12 Suggested Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous to accept the problem associated with alcohol use

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people, wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practise these principles in all our affairs.

Official AA homepage site http://www.casement.com/12_steps.htm - 30 July 2002

Limitations of AA

AA does NOT:

1. Provide initial motivation.
2. Provide detoxification, hospitalization, medical and psychiatric treatment, nursing care and other services which might be required during different phases of treatment.
3. Follow-up patients or try to control dropouts.
4. Deal with the problem of multiple substance use.
5. Appreciate that many problem drinkers have difficulties that precede the onset of alcohol use and persist after abstinence (e.g. anxiety, depression).

Self-help groups in the Region

Started in 1957, AA meetings are held in many cities and in some towns in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Sometimes these meetings are held in churches in India, and a mistaken impression has been generated that these are Christianity-based groups. However, the underlying rationale is not religion-based, but rests on 'faith'. It is necessary to encourage more active referrals to AA and other self-help groups.



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