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**Might alcohol be a problem?**

**Alcohol… *problem?***

**A lot of people think that because alcohol is legal you cannot develop a problem with it.** But like heroin, alcohol is physically addictive and many people develop physical, mental and social problems as a result. Also having an alcohol problem is about more than just being physically dependent. It’s about your physical and mental health, your money, your relationships and your ability to get on with day to day life. It’s also about feeling that you need alcohol to cope.

**It is up to you to decide whether you think you have a problem with alcohol or not.** You may only drink at weekends or you may drink little amounts throughout the week. The recommended limit for adult men is 3-4 units a day and for women, 2-3 units. However, there is *no safe limit for young people.* This is because the organs in the body have not yet matured and are therefore working harder to process the alcohol in its system. You can use a unit calculator to work out your units (there’s one on [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk))

**Most people drink because they have fun or it helps them relax.** Although you may not drink during the week, binge drinking in the weekend carries its own risks. If you are drinking during the week you may develop problems in school, college or work. You may also find that you can’t relax without it. When you think about everything that goes with your use, not just the time that you are drinking, but the bigger picture, check with yourself that it is more fun than a struggle.

**Because alcohol is legal and is seen by many as socially acceptable, people sometimes can’t understand how their use has got out of control or feel embarrassed to admit to anyone, even themselves that they would like to cut down or stop.** If you feel this way remember alcohol is both physically and mentally addictive and there are a large group of people who do struggle with their use and find it very hard to cut down or give up and may need support to do this.

Have a go at the following tick sheet. Generally speaking the more you find you tick, the more you could benefit from cutting down or stopping your drinking.

**Dependence**

* Would you find it hard to face the day or week if you didn’t use this drug / alcohol?
* Do you find it hard to get to sleep without it?
* Do you feel angry or frustrated if you can’t use it?
* Do you have to use more and more to get the same effect?
* Do you find yourself using more than you intended to, or more than you can afford?
* Have you ever tried to stop but not been able to?
* Have you noticed any unpleasant feelings when you stop?
* Are you spending most of your time and energy on getting drugs / alcohol, and not on much else?
* Do you often think you should cut down or stop, but find it too difficult to do?

**Physical Health**

* Do you think it is affecting the way you feel physically?
* Do you ever get stomach pains, liver pains?
* Do you ever get injuries as a result of being under the influence of a drug / alcohol?
* Are you eating lots of sugary junk food rather than proper meals?
* Are you having problems breathing or exercising?
* Do you not have much energy or motivation to do things each day?

**Mental Health**

* Do you ever feel as though you are using drugs / alcohol to feel better but end up feeling worse?
* Do you ever feel anxious or paranoid?
* Are you having problems sleeping?
* Are you forgetting the things you used to do to feel good about yourself and relying on a drug or alcohol to do it instead?

**Sexual Health**

* Have you had sex with someone because you were drunk / using drugs and then regretted it later?
* Have you has unprotected sex because you were drunk / using drugs?

**Relationships**

* Do your friends or family ever tell you they are worried about your use?
* Have you got into arguments with people just because of your use?
* Have you lost contact with people because of your use?
* Do you tend to only spend time with people who use as well, because they won’t give you a hard time?

**Finance**

* Has finding money for drugs / alcohol become more important than spending money on necessities like food, clothes and housing?
* Do you owe money because you are spending on drugs / alcohol?
* Are you going without other things you would really like because all your money goes on it?
* Have you ever added up the amount you spent a month and been shocked?
* Do you have to steal in order to finance your drug / alcohol use?

**Housing**

* Is your home at risk because you use drugs / alcohol?
* Would it cause problems if it was discovered you use at home?

**Law**

* Have you been arrested over your drug use?
* Are you often stopped and searched by the police?
* Do you ever take unnecessary risks, such as using in public due to a strong urge to use?

**Lifestyle and motivation**

* Do you spend most days doing nothing other than getting and using drugs / drinking alcohol?
* Do you feel as though you are not achieving all you would like to because most of your days you spend using?
* Do you keep putting things off and never getting round to them?
* Has your use ever stopped you from getting a job or place on a training course?
* Has it ever had a negative effect on you at work or school or college?

**What next?**

If you’ve decided you want to cut down or stop using the next step is to set a goal and think about how you can reach it. Having a clear idea in your head why you want to cut down will motivate you towards your goal. What do you think life will be like without it? What will you miss about it? What do you hope will improve? Write down everything that is good about alcohol, and everything that is not so good. Using the tick sheet you’ve just filled in might help. Then write down all the benefits of carrying on drinking, then the benefits of cutting down. This should give you a clear idea of what you want to achieve.

Once you have done this decide what your goal is. Do you want to stop completely or cut down? How much do you want to cut down to? What would be ok for you?

Seek some support. It’s the first step to know you want to make some changes and some people are able to do this on their own. Others need support either from family and friends or from outside agencies.

The college counselling service can help you to talk through these issues and look at what you want to do. We can help also help refer you on to a young people’s drug and alcohol service if that is what you decide you would like.

**To contact the Counselling Service**

**Bedfordshire**

01234 291911

counselling@bedford.ac.uk

**Northamptonshire**

01536 513273

Counsellingtresham@bedford.ac.uk

You also drop in to Student Services or speak to your Personal Achievement Tutor