

Problems with alcohol and drugs

Some people may have problems with drinking too much alcohol, or using drugs. These can:

- affect cancer treatment
- make recovery slower
- increase the risk of other cancers and health problems.

How do I know if I have a problem with alcohol and drugs?

You may have a problem with alcohol or drugs if:

- you feel you cannot manage without 1 or both
- you think about alcohol or drugs all the time
- other people are concerned about how much you drink or use
- they are causing you problems with family members, friends or a partner
- they have started causing problems with your health.

NHS guidelines suggest that you should:

- not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol in a week
- spread the alcohol units you drink in a week over 3 or more days
- try to have several alcohol-free days every week.

The number of alcohol units in a drink depends on its type and strength. A unit is a single measure (25ml) of spirits, half a pint of lower-strength beer, lager or cider, or a small glass of wine (125ml). There is more information about how many units are in different drinks on [drinkaware.co.uk](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk) You can use the [Drinkaware calculator](#) to work out how many units you drink.

If you feel you depend on alcohol or drugs, there is support to help you. The first step is to talk to your GP. They will talk through your problems and get you the help you need. They may refer you to local services, or sometimes counselling. Thinking about stopping can seem difficult, especially when you are also coping with cancer. But there are many things to help you cope.

Tips for managing problems with alcohol and drugs

- It is important to talk to your GP before you stop drinking alcohol or using drugs. Stopping suddenly can make you unwell.
- Be honest with yourself and your GP about how much you drink, or how many drugs you use. They need this information to give you the best help.
- Your GP or healthcare team at the hospital can refer you to a local specialist team. They can give you advice and support to help you stop.
- Try switching to low-alcohol or alcohol-free alternatives.
- Talk to your family or friends. They can help support you if you are struggling to cope.
- Talking to people in a similar situation can be helpful. Try joining support groups or online forums.
- Set a goal for each day and try to keep to it. But if you miss your goal, do not give up. Remember that recovery is usually gradual.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Drink less alcohol - easy read](#)
- [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#)
- [Healthy eating and cancer](#)
- [Life after cancer treatment](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Other useful contact details

- Alcoholics Anonymous – visit alcoholicsanonymous.org.uk or call **0800 9177 650**
- Drinkaware – visit drinkaware.co.uk or call **0300 123 1110**
- FRANK – visit talktofrank.com or call **0300 123 6600**
- Mind – visit mind.org.uk or call **0300 123 3393**
- SMART recovery – visit smartrecovery.org.uk

Notes and questions
