ALCOHOL & DRUGS

Stay in Control

University Counselling Service
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Email: counselling.service@nottingham.ac.uk
www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling
SOME PEOPLE CAN’T START THE DAY WITHOUT A CUP OF COFFEE to
wake them up and others find a glass of wine is a pleasant way to unwind
at the end of the day. Many people find social events less daunting after
a few alcoholic drinks and a bar of chocolate provides a comforting treat.

The use of substances to change the way we feel is a normal part of everyday
life. Different cultures adopt different drugs, according to local availability
and historical accident. Customs and rules about drinking and drug use have
developed over time to help societies avoid their less desirable effects.

Most people learn to use the drugs that are available in their society from
their families, from friends, from experimentation and from making mistakes.

In Britain, most adults have drunk alcohol and a sizeable minority have taken
drugs at some point in their lives. In a survey of 3,000 second year students
at 10 UK universities, one in five reported using cannabis at least once a week
and one in three reported experience with other illicit drugs. 46% of the sample
had started using drugs at school*.

What problems causes with alcohol and drugs?

Comparatively few people run into serious problems with alcohol or drug misuse, but it is often a contributory factor in depression, academic failure, relationship problems, debt, violence, breaking the law, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and suicide. Problems can be caused by the substance itself:

- Alcohol and other depressant drugs shut down the central nervous system, so that as you drink, relaxation becomes disinhibition. You may become the life and soul of the party, or you may say things that hurt other people, lash out in anger, get into a car with someone you don’t know, or have sex when you didn’t intend to. You may not remember what you have done. If you continue to drink to try and maintain the feeling of intoxication, your system will continue to shut down and you may fall asleep, or perhaps fall into a coma, or even stop breathing altogether.

- The effects of alcohol and drugs are unpredictable. How much you have eaten, how tired you are, what mood you are in and a range of other factors will affect how you respond to them on different occasions.

- Under the influence of stimulants, such as amphetamines or cocaine, you may feel confident and energised, or you may become agitated, paranoid and aggressive.

- Hallucinogens, like ecstasy and LSD can be an interesting and liberating experience, or a terrifying nightmare.

- Mixing substances, in particular, alcohol and other drugs, can have a more extreme effect than you might expect.

- If you are using illegal drugs, you will have little idea of what you are actually consuming. There is no quality control and it is likely to be cut with other cheaper, possibly harmful, substances.

- Some people seem to be more vulnerable to the effects of drugs, or may have pre-existing mental or physical health conditions. Drugs are sometimes implicated in serious mental health problems and the sudden deaths of young people.

- When you are drunk or out of it, you may be less concerned about having unprotected sex. This may put you at risk of an unwanted pregnancy or of contracting HIV or a sexually transmitted infection.
REGULAR DRINKING OR DRUG USE MAY CAUSE PROBLEMS:

- Many people enjoy the sensation of being intoxicated and want to get back to that state of mind. If you drink or use drugs on a regular basis, over time you will notice that you have to consume more to achieve this effect. This means that your body is developing a tolerance.

- You may start to notice that you feel uncomfortable and edgy if you delay having your regular drink or drug. With some drugs, such as alcohol, nicotine and heroin, the withdrawal symptoms of disturbed sleep, insomnia, irritation, agitation, shaking, sweating and depression can be very uncomfortable.

  Stimulants, such as amphetamines and ecstasy, leave regular users feeling lethargic, depressed, physically drained and lacking in motivation.

  It may be difficult to get up for lectures or work in the morning and it is likely to affect your concentration and performance.

  You may try to relieve these symptoms by further drinking or taking more drugs. “Taking the hair of the dog that bit you” offers only temporary relief and it becomes difficult to get out of this cycle.

- The cost of maintaining a regular drinking or drug habit can be very expensive.

- You may find yourself getting involved in more risky activities, such as sharing needles or dealing, that put you at risk of contracting Hepatitis or HIV or of getting a criminal record.
You don’t have to be an alcoholic or an addict to run into difficulties. There are times when you may be drinking or using drugs to try to cope with other issues:

- Perhaps you don’t feel part of the social scene, so drinking or using drugs may seem like a good way of becoming part of a group that appears to be a bit different or more interesting.

- You might feel shy or uncomfortable with other people, until you have had a few drinks to loosen up.

- Maybe you are feeling low or unhappy about something? Getting high or drunk might offer an escape from how you are feeling, or it may be the only time you can express how you feel. At these times, it is likely to make you feel even more miserable or angry. This can be a real downer for your friends and the people around you.

- Taking hallucinogens, like ecstasy or skunk, when you are worried or troubled can induce paranoia or unpleasant delusions, that may be very disturbing and may affect you for a long time.

If any of this sounds familiar, you might want to ask yourself, if there is anything about your drinking or drug use that you want to change?
If you want to avoid all risks with alcohol or drugs, don’t use them at all. Otherwise, be aware of what you are taking and keep yourself informed about the risks. (There are websites listed at the end of this leaflet that provide current information on drugs and alcohol.)

If you are going out drinking or clubbing, make sure you are amongst friends you can trust. Try to make sure that at least one of you stays sober, to keep an eye on the drinks, to arrange taxis at the end of the evening and to make sure you all get home.

Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, puts you and other people at risk and you could lose your licence. Get a taxi or find out about late buses.

You may feel disinhibited by alcohol or stimulated by drugs, so carry condoms and insist on using them. Better still, arrange to meet at another time, when your judgement may be better.

Let your friends know what you are taking, so that if you run into problems, they can get help. The security and door staff at clubs and pubs should be trained to provide assistance, but don’t rely on this.

Keep in control of what you consume. If a stranger offers to buy you a drink, or to sell you drugs, it is safer to refuse. Your drink may be spiked “for a laugh”, or worse. Drugs may be cut with rubbish, or may be purer than you expect.

Mixing drugs and alcohol, or using alcohol or cannabis to come down off other drugs, is unpredictable and risky. If you are taking anything for medical reasons (such as anti-histamines, antidepressants, paracetamol), remember that these will also react with alcohol and other drugs.

Keep yourself safe. Don’t ever share needles. Get clean needles free from the Health Shop needle exchange. (See the resources list.)

If you are worried about something you have taken, contact your GP for advice. If you feel unwell, go to the Emergency Department at Queen’s Medical Centre, or to your GP.

If you are feeling low or stressed out, drinking or using drugs is likely to make you feel worse. Think about doing something different, that will lift your mood.
If you are finding it difficult to study, or if you are worried about your work or exams, arrangements can be made to help you. Talk to your personal tutor, or someone you trust in your Department or School. Academic Support is also there to advise and offer practical help with academic issues.

Sometimes, drinking or drug use is a way of trying to cope with a bad patch. You may be able to get back in control, preferably with some support from your friends or family. It can be a relief just to tell someone else what you are going through. Not everyone will be able to help, but some people will try to understand your feelings, or may have had similar experiences.

Try keeping a record for a week of what you are consuming. Ask yourself, how much does it cost? What are the consequences? Hangovers? Missing lectures? Fights? Arguments? Unwanted sexual encounters? Be honest with yourself. Are you happy with the way you are drinking, or using drugs?

Set a limit on what you consume or how much you are going to spend. As a guide for alcohol consumption, most healthy adult women will not experience problems if they drink 14 units in a week and no more than 3 units in a day. For men, the recommended safe limit is 21 units a week and no more than 4 units in a day. (A unit is a small glass of wine, a pub measure of spirits or a half-pint of ordinary beer or lager.)

Have a few alcohol or drug free days each week, to give your body a chance to recover. If you find this difficult, it may indicate that you have developed a problem.

Remember that most “recreational” drug use is illegal, including cannabis. Ecstasy is a class “A” drug, like heroin and cocaine. If you are stopped by the police, you may be prosecuted for possession or for dealing. This may be particularly serious if you want a career in medicine, nursing, or the law. Possessing illegal drugs in your accommodation may have consequences for your housemates and could get you evicted or prosecuted.

There are many people in the University to whom you can turn for support. These may include your personal tutor, senior tutor, your hall tutor or warden, or any other member of staff. They will be able to put you in touch with someone who can offer more specialist help if necessary. There are also other members of the University such as the chaplains, the Students’ Union welfare officer and the welfare reps in the halls of residence, whom you may wish to approach.

There are various organisations providing advice, information and support and there is useful information on the internet and in self-help books. Resources are listed at the end of this leaflet.
If you are concerned about a friend or a housemate, you could try telling them how you feel. They may be a bit uncomfortable and defensive, so try to get them to talk about what is bothering them, rather than confronting them.

Sometimes listening can be a great help and problems can seem a bit less overwhelming when they are shared with someone else. This might be the help the person needs to start turning things around. You do not have to come up with answers or solve their problems.

If they want to cut down, or cut out, their drinking or drug use, you may want to support them, by arranging nights in, or out, that don’t involve drink or drugs, perhaps even cutting down yourself.

It is not helpful to try to control other people’s drinking or drug use, by confiscating, or hiding their drink or drugs. This will lead to arguments and bad feelings. They have to take control themselves, or get more specialised help.

You might encourage your friend to talk with someone else in the University. This could be their personal tutor, their academic tutor, or someone else in their Department or School, particularly if they are running into problems with their work. If they live in hall, the hall tutor, the warden or the welfare reps, may be a good source of information and support.
If you are with a person who is having a bad experience with drugs, they may be very frightened. Help them to find somewhere quiet, away from noise and lights and reassure them. If you continue to be concerned, encourage them to get medical attention at the Emergency Department of the Queen’s Medical Centre, or from their own GP.

If the person is unconscious, or has taken an overdose, they will require a medical assessment immediately. If they are not willing, or able, to attend the hospital or their GP, you will have to take action, or tell someone else who can take responsibility. If the incident happens in hall, this will be the hall tutor, or the warden. If the incident happens in your house, you should phone the emergency services (dial 999 from any phone). If you know what your friend has taken, give this information to the paramedics. It could save your friend’s life.

It can be very frustrating and difficult to have a housemate, or a friend, with a drug or alcohol problem and you may need advice or support for yourself. It may be, that their behaviour is disrupting your work, or your peace of mind and you may want some advice on what to do. The services in the University are also there to support and advise you.
You may want to get in touch with someone who is in a position to help, if you find that:

- You can’t manage a day without a drink, or without taking drugs
- You have financial problems caused by your drinking, or drug use
- Your drinking, or drug use, is leading to conflict with your family or friends
- You regularly miss lectures because of drinking sessions, or drug use, or you are finding it difficult to concentrate or motivate yourself to work.

If so, there are resources at the University and in Nottingham listed in this leaflet, where you will find information, advice, support and treatment. They will help you to consider what approach might best suit you and assist you in getting the help you need.

If you prefer to make an initial approach to someone you know, your personal, academic or senior tutor, your hall tutor, hall warden, or any member of staff, can put you in touch with more specialist help. The chaplains, the Students’ Union welfare officer and the welfare reps in halls, will also be able to advise and support you.
**AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM**

**The University Counselling Service** offers free, confidential counselling, group therapy and workshops to undergraduate and postgraduate students and to University staff. The Service also offers support to those concerned about the welfare of a friend, housemate, relative or colleague. Counselling is available at University Park, Sutton Bonington, Jubilee and some School of Nursing and Midwifery Centres.

To arrange an initial appointment, telephone **0115 951 3695**, or e-mail **counselling.service@nottingham.ac.uk** or call in to room **A75 Trent Building, University Park**. Visit the web site at [www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/) for further information and useful self-help links.

- **Your GP** can offer you support, advice, referral to specialist help or medical treatment. If you are registered with Cripps Health Centre, telephone **0115 846 8888** (internal extension 75). Out of hours calls will be referred to Nottingham Emergency Medical Services.

- **Academic Support** offers advice, practical help and support to individual students experiencing study problems, in addition to assisting students with dyslexia or a disability. They also offer a range of workshops and groups throughout the academic year.

  For details, visit their website at [www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicsupport](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicsupport), or contact them at **Student Services Centre, Portland Building, telephone 0115 951 3710**.

- Each School appoints a **Disability Liaison Officer** (DLO) to provide advice and guidance for students and members of staff, about disability issues and to offer support. For further information, visit the web site at [www.nottingham.ac.uk/disability/disliaison](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/disability/disliaison).

- **The chaplains** offer spiritual and emotional support and guidance, to students and staff of all faiths, or none. Contact the chaplains in the **Portland Building, University Park** or telephone **0115 951 3931**.

- **The Students’ Union welfare officer** and the welfare reps in hall offer advice and support. Contact them through the **Student Advice and Representation Centre** in the **Portland Building**, telephone **0115 846 8730**.

- **Nightline**, telephone **0115 951 4985**, offers a confidential telephone listening service, run by students for students which is available from 7pm-8am every night during term-time.
LOCAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

- **The Health Shop**, 12 Broad Street, Hockley, Nottingham, telephone 0115 947 5414. Offers free and confidential, information, advice and counselling on sexual health and drug use. They also offer a needle and syringe exchange.

- **Speakeasy at Connexions**, 24-32 Carlton Street, Hockley, Nottingham, telephone 0115 992 6102. Offers free counselling, information and support for young people aged between 13 and 25.

- **Base 51**, 51 Glasshouse Street, Nottingham, telephone 0115 952 5040 is a holistic health care project for young people aged between 12 and 25, who find it difficult to access mainstream health services.

- **The Samaritans** offer a listening ear 24 hours a day, Telephone 08457 90 90 90 (calls charged at local rate).

- **Alcohol Concern** provides information and research about alcohol. The web site [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk) has fact sheets about alcohol and a directory of local treatment services.

- **Drugscope** telephone 020 7520 7550. Provides information and research about drugs. Their web site at [www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk) offers current information about drugs (legal status, effects etc.) and details of local drug services.

- **Release** provides a telephone helpline (Mon–Fri, 11am–1pm & 2pm–4pm) 0845 4500 215 and a web site [www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk) for legal advice about drug issues.

- **Last Orders** [www.last-orders.org](http://www.last-orders.org) offers free, practical and confidential advice to people who want to reduce their drinking. They run a weekly clinic at Cripps Health Centre to which students can be referred by their GP or can self-refer. For appointments telephone 0800 055 6184.

FURTHER READING

**Controlling your drinking** (Miller and Muñoz, The Guildford Press)