

PATIENT INFORMATION

Information on Alcohol Dependence

What is alcohol dependence

Being dependent on alcohol means a person feels they're not able to function or survive without it and drinking becomes an important - or sometimes the most important - factor in their life.

People who are becoming dependent on alcohol notice they need to drink more to get the same effect. They often give priority to drinking over other activities or obligations (such as work or family life), or continue drinking despite harmful consequences - for example, liver disease, increased risk of strokes and heart disease, cancer or depression/anxiety caused by drinking.

Alcohol dependence also causes physical withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking

- Tremors (the shakes)
- Increased pulse rate
- Loss of appetite
- Agitation
- Confusion / Delirium
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Anxiety
- Insomnia (difficulty sleeping)
- Seizures

Managing alcohol dependency

If you are dependent on alcohol, have physical symptoms when you don't drink, you **MUST NOT SUDDENLY STOP DRINKING** as this can be very dangerous.

It is important to carefully reduce your bodies reliance on alcohol and not suddenly stop as this can be very dangerous to your body.

As well as a physical reliance on alcohol, there is a very strong psychological element to alcohol dependency, and this also needs to be addressed if you want to reduce/abstain from alcohol and keep this going.

There is usually a reason why someone starts to drink, and this can still be very real, other ways of managing this needs to be explored for someone to reduce the psychological need to drink and achieve safer drinking or abstinence.

Want to change the amount you drink?

There are different ways to reduce and stop drinking when you are dependant. It is strongly advised to seek professional advice/support in achieving this. Methods include:

- Slowly reducing how much you drink - This will involve reducing the amount you drink slowly by 10% every 2-3 days. You must listen to your body and if symptoms increase you are reducing too fast. (Further information on Alcohol Change website, contact local alcohol service or Torbay hospital alcohol care team.)
- Engaging with the community alcohol services who can advise on the safest/best way to support you to reduce, this could be weaning and, in some cases, may involve support with medication either at home or in a residential setting.

Once you have been alcohol dependant It will **always** be very difficult to control how much you drink (even social drinking).

We always advise “aim to stay alcohol-free”

Don't feel ready to make changes with your drinking?

It can be daunting and scary to take those first steps.

It may help to talk through the reasons you are drinking, how it is making you feel, listen to other people's stories and experiences (How they felt when they started making changes, their experiences of seeking help, the challenges and how they overcame them and how things are for them now.)

You will find a lot of information on Alcohol Change UK website, by contacting your local community alcohol service or if you are in hospital speak to the alcohol care team.

Even if you don't feel ready to make big changes in your drinking, you can still make some positive changes.

Stabilising what you are drinking, keep it consistent each day and only drink what you need to keep yourself safe from withdrawals.

Some tips on how to stabilise what you are drinking:

- Only drink to keep control of your withdrawal symptoms, don't drink to make yourself drunk.
- Sip your drink and avoid gulping it down.
- If you don't need a drink as soon as you wake up leave it until your body starts needing it.
- Keep a note of how much you drink a day. If you can also write down what you were feeling before you had the drink, why did you feel you needed one?

In the past you will have overcome a challenge, made a change in your life

Think about this, how did you do it?

You can do the same with Alcohol?

When you leave hospital

When you are in hospital you will have likely started to withdraw from alcohol, and we would have given you some medication to help with this.

Depending on how long you have been in hospital your body will likely not need as much alcohol as when you came into hospital and in some cases you may not need to drink any alcohol at all to manage any alcohol withdrawals.

Whatever your plans are with your alcohol use, we advise the following when discharged:

If the Alcohol team have given you specific advice before you leave hospital
follow their advice.

- **For the rest of the day when you go home from hospital** - only drink as much as you need to cover any withdrawal symptoms (relief drinking). Sip alcohol until the symptoms are controlled and then wait for them to return before drinking again.
- Do the same the next day and make a note of how much you have needed to drink to keep control of your withdrawal symptoms. (See the drinks diary over the page)
- For the following days you can then use this as the amount your body will need to keep you safe.
- If you want to continue reducing how much you are drinking follow the advice on weaning (Page 2), or contact your local community alcohol service for support.

Resources

Website

- Alcohol change UK
- BreakingFree online (also available as an app)

Phone App Support

- NHS drink free days and MyDrinkaware.
 - Both available through Google Play store and Apple Store

Mutual Aid Groups

- **SMART Recovery** <https://smartrecovery.org.uk>
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** You can call us in complete confidence on 0800 9177 650, message us via our live chat box on alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk or email us at help@aamail.org.

If you would like some support with your alcohol or drug use, you can contact your local community service below:

Torbay

Torbay Drug and Alcohol Service,
Walnut Lodge and Shrublands House
01803 60433

South Devon

Devon Alcohol Service, Together
0800 233 5444

Your GP service is a reliable source for information and support

Drinks Diary -Use this to record your drinking over a week.

(You can download additional copies from the internet, or email us on tsdft.alcoholcareteam@nhs.net)

Day	Time	Amount	How were you feeling?
MONDAY			
TUESDAY			
WEDNESDAY			
THURSDAY			
FRIDAY			
SATURDAY			
SUNDAY			

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.