# Alcohol: Use vs. abuse



The occasional drink may actually be good for us. Three to five alcoholic drinks a week has been shown to reduce our risk of developing heart disease and stroke and possibly diabetes. However, regularly drinking too much is not good for our physical or mental health and can lead to many negative consequences, including:

Legal issues
Financial concerns
Relationship difficulties
Work problems

**Alcohol and your brain**

Alcohol interferes with the communication pathways in our brains, causing memory lapses, changes in behaviour, loss of coordination, mood swings and an inability to think clearly. The more we consume, the greater the impairment. If we drink enough, we can lose control of these functions completely and lose consciousness or even die.

Alcohol abuse can lead to a number of long-term mental health issues, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Learning and memory problems
- Dementia

**Alcohol and your body**

Alcohol abuse can also result in very serious physical issues such as

- Liver disease
- Certain cancers
- Pancreatitis
- Heart muscle damage (alcoholic cardiomyopathy) leading to heart failure
- Stroke
- High blood pressure

**When does alcohol use become abuse?**

How do you know if you or someone you love is developing a drinking problem? Here are some signs:

- Personality changes when drinking
- Guilt and shame about drinking or behaviours when drinking
- Hiding drinking habits
- Drinking to feel better or cope with social situations
- Black outs – having no memory of what happened while drinking
- Finding it hard to stop after one or two drinks or ending up drunk
- Drinking is having a negative impact on work, relationships or finances
- People are expressing concerns

If you are struggling with alcohol or are worried about someone you love, reach out for help. **Contact us** for information, support and local resources.