

## What help can your GP provide?

In recent years, many GPs have done extra training in mental health care to improve their skills in this area.

Your GP will work with you to try to understand:

- when you started drinking;
- what it is that makes you feel like drinking;
- whether other people in your family have had similar problems; and
- whether your alcohol consumption is causing your depression and/or anxiety, or vice versa.

Once your GP has assessed the situation, he or she will discuss with you a number of options for treatment, including:

1. **Ways of cutting down your drinking**, this can include techniques such as:
  - keeping a **drinking diary** where you record how much you drink; and
  - setting **goals** to reduce your alcohol consumption.
2. **Medications** are available for the treatment of anxiety and depression. It is best to ask your GP about the benefits and risks of these options, as well as ways of managing any possible side effects. Your GP should be aware of the latest information about medications.
3. Your GP may be trained in **psychological/counselling therapies** or may prefer to refer you to a specialist who is an expert in these therapies.
4. Your GP can provide you with **information** to help you understand your health problems and how to deal with them. This involves teaching you about your health problems, how to treat them, and how to recognise signs of relapse so that you can do something before your health gets worse.

5. **Self-help strategies** can involve a number of approaches to improve your health and prevent further problems occurring, including:
- tips for controlled moderate drinking;
  - strategies for managing stress, anxiety and negative feelings; and
  - ways of staying well, such as:
    - regular exercise;
    - looking after your diet;
    - reading; and
    - meditation.
6. **Self-help groups** can provide a safe environment for support, guidance, information and understanding. Self help groups can also be a valuable opportunity to meet people who have recovered from their problems, and to learn from people who have had similar experiences.

Talk to your GP for more information about these treatments. You can also read more about them at [www.mhca.com.au](http://www.mhca.com.au)





## Expect trial and error

Some people with anxiety, depression and alcohol problems have previously received treatment that has not solved their problems. This does not prevent you seeking treatment again. Talk with your GP about these treatments and why they did not work for you.

Setbacks can occur, and it often takes more than one attempt to get your medication or other treatments right. There are also things you can do to prevent setbacks. Ask your GP for more information about the self-help techniques described in this document.

If you feel you aren't getting better, tell your GP. Don't feel you need to please your GP by saying you're okay when you're not!

## When will a GP provide a referral?

There may be some situations in which your GP prefers to refer you to an alternative GP or specialist with specific interest and training in anxiety, depression and alcohol problems.

If your GP wants to refer you to a specialist, some useful questions you might want to ask include:

- What is the location and cost for the service?
- How long is the waiting period for this service?
- Will you continue to see me?
- How long will my appointment be?
- How long will my treatment program be?
- What are the benefits of referral to a specialist?
- What treatment approaches are available? (eg, individual, group, family, couples)
- What are the likely benefits of different treatment approaches?

You may not be ready to immediately accept a referral and may need more time to think about it before making a commitment. This is fine. In this situation your GP could schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss the issue at a later time. You could also use this time to learn more about anxiety, depression and alcohol problems, as well as the treatment options available.