

Consumer and carer resources

Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA)

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) developed consumer and carer education resources for use in Managing the Mix.

The MHCA is the independent, national representative network of organisations and individuals committed to achieving quality mental health for everyone in Australia. The MHCA constituency includes consumers, carers, special needs groups, clinical service providers, private mental health service providers, non-government organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and state/territory-based peak bodies.

Purpose of resources

The resources — a poster, fact sheet and pamphlet — are specific to alcohol problems and comorbid depression and anxiety and designed for use in the primary health care setting. The resources were used as general community awareness tools and as an adjunct for GPs, supported by the divisions participating in Managing the Mix. The resources are aimed at enhancing general practice responsiveness to comorbid alcohol and mental health problems.

Consultation process

Development of the consumer and carer resources involved an extensive consultation process with consumers, carers, clinicians, divisions of general practice staff, mental health workers and drug and alcohol workers. Throughout the process, the MHCA worked in collaboration with the project partners of Managing the Mix.

Promotion and distribution

Participating divisions promoted and distributed the resources to their GPs and the community, including through Managing the Mix training, mental health and drug and alcohol training events, direct mail out to GPs, practice visits, advertising, community events, project reference groups, contact with consumer and carer support groups.

Although the resources were aimed primarily at GPs and their clinics, a number of divisions also distributed resources through local agencies, including alcohol and drug and mental health services.

Accessing these resources

The complete resources can be downloaded from the CD enclosed with the hard copy of this Resource Kit. Alternatively, download from the ADGP website at:

<http://www.adgp.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=4618>

How to use these resources

The resources are designed for adults who are presenting to general practice, most likely for the first time, with alcohol, anxiety and depression problems. The resources are intended to be as simple and direct as possible.

Poster

The **poster** is intended for use in the waiting room at a general practice to attract the attention of someone who is at a pre-contemplative or contemplative stage of acceptance. Basic screening questions on the poster are intended to encourage the reader to seek help from his/her GP.

Fact sheet

The poster is supplemented by a one-page, double-sided, **fact sheet**. The fact sheet includes some basic screening questions and tips for seeing a GP. It is best made available in a GP's waiting room, but is also intended to be used by GPs as a tool to assist with consultations. A GP who has identified a patient as being either at risk, or already suffering from low to medium severity alcohol problems with co-occurring anxiety and/or depression problems can provide the fact sheet to help the person recognise the existence of the problems. The fact sheet can easily be read in a couple of minutes during a consultation, and gives the patient something to think over.

The fact sheet is not intended for those people who are already identified and receiving treatment as the content could be considered too basic for such individuals.

Pamphlet

The multi-page **pamphlet** is the core resource, with the additional resources intended as adjuncts. Coverage of topics is kept to a minimum in line with advice from workshop participants as well as those responding to the resource drafts.

The multi-page pamphlet has been designed to encourage and assist people who may not realise they have co-occurring alcohol, anxiety and/or depression problems (and their carers) to work with a GP to address these issues. The resources are intended to raise awareness that these problems commonly occur together, as well as provide information and advice about risks, treatment options, GP support, and referrals.


A graphic designer was engaged to illustrate the booklet with cartoons and diagrams to support the text. Graphics also appear on the poster and fact sheet. The graphics depict a range of people, male and female and reflecting different ethnic backgrounds, in scenarios intended to convey a positive message about collaboration between consumers, carers and GPs in addressing the aforementioned co-morbid problems.

Additional features such as the *Emergency contact numbers* and *Medications list* can be used by consumers and carers throughout treatment.

Like the fact sheet, there is a need to rely on GPs to identify patients who would benefit from the multi-page pamphlet. The resource is considered appropriate for those who are at the 'pre-contemplative', 'contemplative' or 'action' stages of acceptance.



Poster

Alcohol, Anxiety and Depression









Have you been feeling:

- sad and hopeless?
- worried and anxious?
- do you drink to cope?



Your GP can help!



Your Mental Health & Alcohol: Managing the Mix

Alcohol, Anxiety and Depression

Does this sound like you?

We all experience times of poor physical health in our life, and it is the same for our mental health. Consider the questions listed below which outline some common feelings. If you answer "yes" to some of these questions it's a good idea to see your doctor for a professional assessment.

Do you feel:

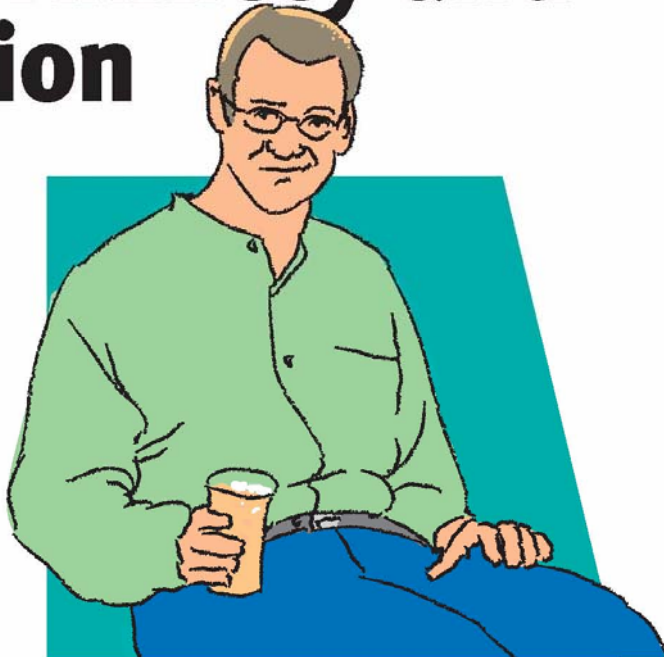
- tired and run down?
- sad and hopeless?
- irritable much of the time?
- like you don't want to do anything?
- that you may never feel happy again?
- confused and don't know what is happening to you?
- Are you having difficulty sleeping, waking in the early hours and not being able to get back to sleep, or are you finding it difficult to get up in the morning?

Or do you feel:

- worried and anxious much of the time?
- as though your heart is pounding?
- as though something dreadful is about to happen?
- that you are withdrawing from your normal activities?
- like you have knots and butterflies in your stomach when faced with a difficult situation, or find yourself avoiding situations that cause you to feel uncomfortable and anxious?

And:

- have you ever thought you drink too much?
- has a friend, relative or doctor ever been concerned about your drinking?
- do you regularly have more than four drinks on any one occasion?
- do you drink to cope with stress, loneliness, anger, or sleeplessness?
- have you tried to cut down or stop drinking without success?



If this sounds like you, it is time to talk to your GP. You may be suffering from depression, anxiety and/or alcohol problems. These are the most common mental health problems affecting people in Australia. Depression affects one in five people, and anxiety disorders affect at least one in eight people in Australia at some time in their lifetime. Your GP will be able to help you and provide effective treatment for these problems. If required, your GP can also refer you to a specialist for extra help.

Effective treatments are available. Early identification and care can reduce harm and improve your quality of life.

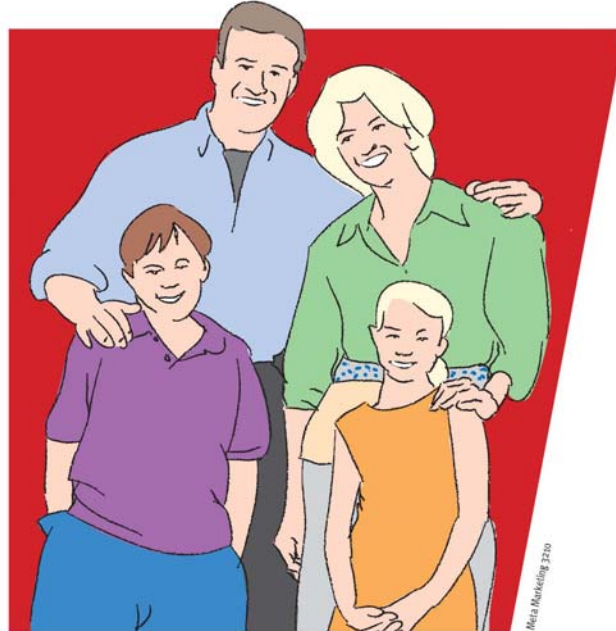
Questions to ask your GP

Good questions to ask a GP can include:

- Why don't I feel well?
- What can I do about it?
- Are there any other options?
- Where can I find out more information?
- When do I need to see you again?
- How often do I need to see you?
- How can I stay healthy?
- Is this something you can treat or will you refer me to someone else?
- Can you refer me to someone if I am not getting better?
- How can my family be involved, and where can they get information?
- What support is available for my family and my children?
- Are interpreters available to assist me if required?

Handy Hints:

- Let your GP know if you are getting help from anyone else, such as other doctors, self-help groups, family and friends, or natural therapists.
- Remember to provide your GP with your full list of medications (including over-the-counter medications, vitamins and natural therapies) because he or she may not be aware of everything you have been prescribed (particularly if you also see other doctors).
- If you are uncertain or nervous about speaking to a GP, take a friend or family member with you. He or she can also help you to remember information provided by your GP.
- Ask your GP for a general health check to see what else might be adding to the way you feel. For example, heavy snoring can cause bad sleep.
- Many general practices can provide a practice nurse to help you with your appointments. You can speak to a practice nurse if you are uncertain or nervous about speaking to a GP.
- Many GPs are registered with a new mental health initiative.



Your Mental Health & Alcohol: Managing the Mix

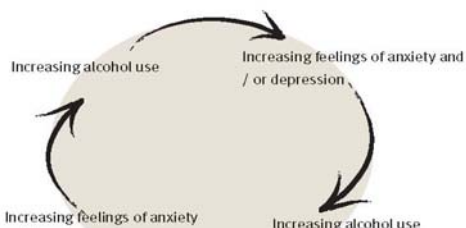
**Anxiety, Depression and Alcohol:
Why is it important to seek help?**

Anxiety, depression and alcohol problems have a complex relationship where each can make the other worse. These problems are common, and can occur together for many people of all ages and from all walks of life. Anxiety, depression and alcohol problems can vary widely in form and severity. In many cases, they can be resolved with a combination of professional help and support from family and friends. Self-help groups are also highly effective.

Sometimes people use alcohol to make themselves feel better. At first, alcohol may seem to help with feelings of sadness, anxiety or stress. However, long-term drinking soon makes these feelings worse.

This is because long-term alcohol misuse actually causes depression, and makes it harder for your brain to cope with problems. Long-term alcohol misuse can also lead to relationship breakdown, social isolation, job loss and money problems.

These effects can lead people to drinking more in the hope that it will help them deal with problems, causing a cycle of increasing feelings of anxiety and/or depression and heavy drinking to cope.



Why see a GP?

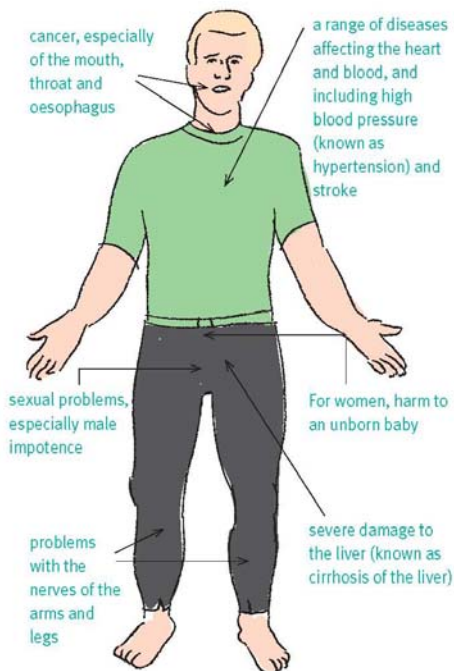
About 85% of people in Australia see a GP each year. Over 10 million consultations are for mental health related problems, and up to 1/3 of adults seen by GPs are drinking at “at risk” levels. GPs are best placed to first identify and help people with alcohol, anxiety and depression problems.

You and your GP can identify how these problems go together and work out straightforward things to do. The first step is to find a GP you feel comfortable with. You can also discuss with your GP options for involving family, partners or other people with your care. The best approach is to work with your GP to develop a list of things you can do to improve your health and prevent setbacks.

It might take several consultations for you and your GP to sort out your problems. Be prepared to make further appointments. If cost is a problem discuss this with your GP.

Where extra professional help is needed, you can ask your GP to help you find it. Your GP can work with others to coordinate your overall care.

Alcohol, anxiety, and depression problems can also affect your physical health. Long term physical health consequences from regularly drinking too much include:



Alcohol can also reduce the effectiveness of medications and impair your ability to drive or operate machinery.



What help can your GP provide?

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.

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!

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



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.