



Signs of alcohol dependence

Everyone's situation is different. It's not possible to predict if and when someone will become dependent on alcohol.

Signs of alcohol dependence

Signs of alcohol dependence include:

- not being able to function without alcohol - for example, not being able to do your job or carry out daily tasks
- drinking has become an important, or the most important, thing in life
- continuing to drink despite negative consequences for you or your loved ones
- finding it difficult to control the amount or the times when you drink
- finding it difficult to stop drinking when you want to
- not always being able to plan with certainty how much you are going to drink on an occasion
- drinking increasing amounts of alcohol
- craving alcohol or having withdrawal symptoms
- not seeming to be drunk after drinking large amounts

Patterns of drinking if you are dependent on alcohol

Alcohol dependence affects different people in different ways.

If you are dependent on alcohol, you may drink:

- a lot of the time
- first thing in the morning
- every evening
- every day

You may also stop drinking for many weeks or months, but lose control when you start drinking again.

Patterns of harmful alcohol use

Some people might not be completely dependent on alcohol, but may indulge in harmful patterns of alcohol use. For example, you may binge drink only at weekends or have periods of not drinking.

Get help with problem alcohol use

Freephone 1800 459 459 (Link: <tel:1800 459 459>) for confidential advice



Find alcohol services and supports (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/alcohol-services/>)

Talk to your GP or another healthcare provider if:

- you are worried that you are becoming dependent on alcohol

Feelings and behaviours

If you suffer from alcohol dependence, you may:

- spend a lot of time thinking and planning what and when you will be able to drink
- feel anxious, unhappy or tense until you have a drink
- feel unwell

While you are drinking

Alcohol acts quickly on the brain. It can change your feelings and behaviour for a while, depending on the amount you drink.

You may like the effects of alcohol and want to keep drinking to keep experiencing those effects.

You may also:

- do embarrassing things
- get aggressive
- take risks

If you do not drink

If you are dependent on alcohol and cannot get any alcohol, you may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- feeling anxious and upset
- feeling irritable or angry
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/insomnia/>))
- physical withdrawal symptoms (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/dependence/withdrawal-symptoms/>), such as shaking (tremor), sweating and sickness (nausea)

You may also have more severe symptoms, such as visual hallucinations or seizures.

How alcohol dependence develops

Alcohol dependence can happen quite quickly. But it often happens after many years of heavy drinking.

Sometimes it begins with social drinking. This becomes more frequent, until you can no longer control your drinking.

In other cases, you might use alcohol to cope with problems or difficult times. Over time your drinking increases until you can no longer manage without it.

Not everyone who abuses alcohol is dependent on alcohol. Abusing alcohol can also affect your health and relationships.

Why it is hard to stop

It is possible to stop drinking when you are dependent on alcohol. It can be difficult, but lots of people have done it.

There are 2 main types of dependence which can make it hard to stop:

- physical dependence
- psychological dependence

Physical dependence

Physical dependence is when your body needs and craves alcohol. It can mean feeling very ill without alcohol.

Symptoms of physical dependence include:

- shaking hands (tremor)
- feeling sick (nausea)
- sweating
- seizures (fits)
- anxiety
- insomnia

You may need medicine to help you stop drinking alcohol.

Psychological dependence

You may have a psychological dependence on alcohol (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/dependence/psychological-dependence/>). This is when you find it hard to stop your drinking habits.

It can feel difficult to face the world without alcohol if it has become a big part of your life. For example, if you use alcohol as a way to try and cope with things.

If you are worried about your alcohol use, take our alcohol test (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/alcohol/self-assessment-tool/>) to find out what type of drinker you are.

More in Alcohol dependence (Link: </living-well/alcohol/dependence/>)

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms (Link: </living-well/alcohol/dependence/withdrawal-symptoms/>)

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Psychological dependence (Link: </living-well/alcohol/dependence/psychological-dependence/>)

Risk factors for alcohol dependence (Link: </living-well/alcohol/dependence/becoming-dependent/>)

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