

Problematic substance use

mindcheck.ca

and young people

The term “substance use” is used to refer to the use of legal or illegal drugs, including alcohol, that affect the way a person thinks, feels or acts. Some of the more commonly used substances by young people include alcohol, illegal drugs such as marijuana, and non-medical use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs.

substance use has many faces

Many young people will experiment with alcohol and/or other drugs and decide not to use some or all of them again. Others will continue to use substances, and a smaller number will develop problematic substance use.

understanding risks of substance use

All substances have risks associated with their use. Risk from substance use can range from very low to very high, and harm can occur even from first-time use. Harms can be immediate, such as being injured while intoxicated, or longer term, such as problems at school or work.

Understanding the risks and taking steps to reduce the likelihood of harm is an important part of using alcohol or other drugs.

safer use of alcohol and drugs

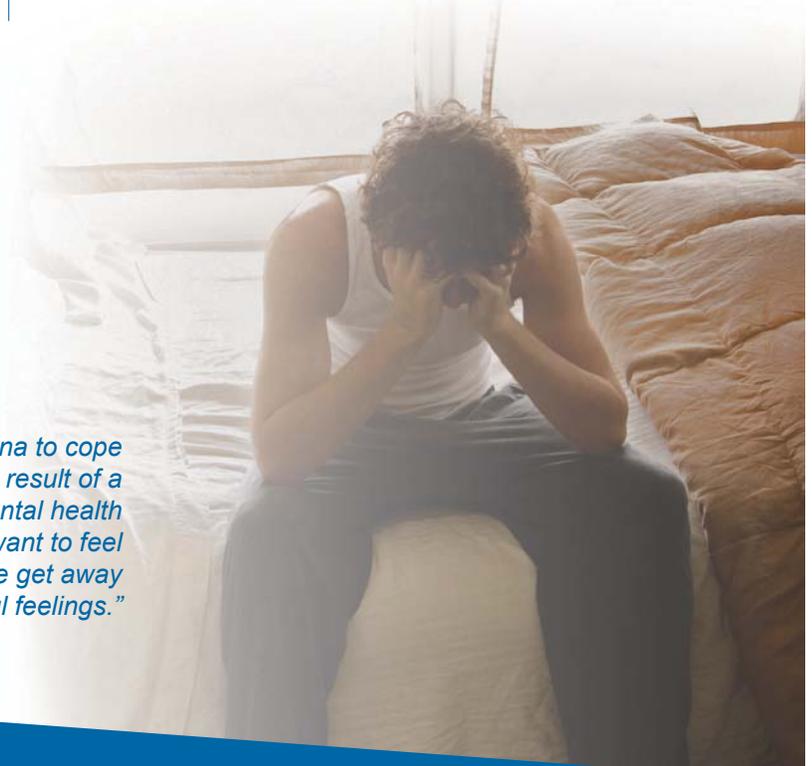
- Check out Canada’s Low Risk Drinking Guidelines at: <http://www.ccsa.ca/2011%20CCSA%20Documents/2011-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-en.pdf>
- Use when in the company of trusted friends who know what to do in an emergency.
- If using for the first time or are unsure of how it will affect you, use only a small amount.
- Keep in mind that a drug can affect you differently each time.
- Plan your use rather than using spontaneously.
- Periodically take a holiday from your alcohol or other drug use.

For more tips, please visit mindcheck.ca

DID YOU KNOW?

For those who develop a substance use problem, it is common to also find a mental health problem.

John sometimes binges on alcohol and marijuana to cope with symptoms of anxiety he developed as a result of a trauma he went through. As John later put it, “Mental health issues and substance use go hand in hand. You want to feel something different, and getting loaded helps me get away from those awful feelings.”



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mindcheck.ca encourages the early detection and intervention of mental health and substance use issues in British Columbian teens and young adults.



When substance use becomes problematic

Knowing the signs of when substance use may be becoming a problem helps a young person know when they need to take action.

It's time to take a closer look at one's substance use when it starts to have a negative effect on mental or physical health, school, work or other areas of one's life, or is causing problems in relationships with family or friends.

If you feel you no longer have control over your use, find you're not making good decisions about your use, or you're concerned about how often you're using, it's time to take action. Check it out @ mindcheck.ca

What to look for

Certain personal characteristics or life circumstances can increase the likelihood that someone will develop a substance use problem. These are referred to as "risk factors."

The more risk factors there are, the greater the chances of developing a problem.

Risk factors include:

- Not fitting in with peers or being excluded because of reasons such as race or sexual orientation.
- Experiences of emotional, physical or sexual abuse or other trauma.
- Family problems or conflict.
- Not meeting expectations (either one's own or others).
- Having untreated anxiety, depression or another mental health condition.
- Having a family history of substance use problems.

How alcohol use can be harmful

Young people who drink to get drunk are more likely to engage in risky behaviour, which contributes to:

- **Physical injury and death** – alcohol-related injury is the major cause of death in young people.
- **Sexual risk-taking** – including unwanted sexual contact, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Suicide and self-harm** – higher in young people who drink heavily or frequently.

DID YOU KNOW?

- *Alcohol is the most common substance used by young people.*
- *Binge drinking (heavy drinking that results in drunkenness) is a concern because of risk of potential harms such as injuries, violence or alcohol overdose.*

Help is available

When young people have difficulty coping, they may use alcohol and/or other drugs as a way to feel better or to provide escape. For others, what was initially fun and exciting may now be a problem in their lives.

Visit mindcheck.ca and take the **alcohol quiz** or **drug use quiz** if you think your substance use is becoming a problem in your life and find out how to get help for yourself. Acting early can help prevent more serious problems from developing later on.

Check it out... Act now!

Information and resources: mindcheck.ca