

Does Alcohol Cause Mental Illness?

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Many people drink alcohol in moderation, but for some people, it becomes an issue. People suffering from trauma or a mental illness, for example, can be more susceptible to alcohol abuse. They may use alcohol to cope with feelings of anxiety or to relieve their symptoms. Those who have painful memories can use alcohol to temporarily block them out. Unfortunately, relying on alcohol to deal with your anxiety or the symptoms of a mental illness can have a negative effect over time. If you suffer from a mental illness and regularly drink alcohol, you may ask “does alcohol cause mental illness?”

Alcohol and Brain Chemistry

Alcohol, like many other substances that people take to feel better, affects brain chemistry. Specifically, alcohol is a depressant and can disrupt that balance, impacting how the brain functions. This can, in turn, affect your thoughts, feelings, and actions. As you’d expect, the more you drink, the more pronounced these effects will be.

For many people, controlled drinking in moderation isn’t necessarily an issue. However, excessive drinking can lead to negative emotions and even aggressive behavior, as their inhibitions are lowered. This, in turn, can harm mental health.

This is bad enough if someone drinks too much on one occasion, as they may act in ways that they come to regret and feel those negative emotions. However, if this becomes a regular occurrence, it can become a major issue.

Even worse, if you already suffer from a mental illness, your brain chemistry might be even more sensitive to the effects of alcohol. Different illnesses react differently to alcohol. Also, your medication may react with alcohol and cause an exaggerated or unpredictable effect.

The Potential Effects of Alcohol

Different people won’t react in the same way to the effects of alcohol. This comes down to several things, such as their biology, their tolerance of alcohol, what medications they’re taking, and what mental illness they suffer from. Here are some of the more common ways that alcohol can exacerbate certain conditions or illnesses.

Alcohol and Anxiety

Initially, it may seem as though alcohol will help with anxiety. Alcohol can make you feel more relaxed and confident, so you might think that it’s the ideal way to deal with feelings of anxiety. However, the relaxed feeling doesn’t last forever.

When the relaxing effects of alcohol wear off, your body will process it. This can cause you to become more dehydrated and you may experience feelings of depression, anxiety, or agitation. The potential hangover in the morning can further intensify feelings of anxiety.

One pressing issue with using alcohol to cope with anxiety is the fact that your body will develop a tolerance to it over time. This means that you have to drink more alcohol to get the same feeling. Eventually, this may lead to alcohol dependence, meaning that your anxiety will be far worse when you’re sober.

Alcohol and Depression

Alcohol abuse and depression are closely linked. This is because people with depression are more prone to drinking heavily, and heavy drinkers are more likely to be diagnosed with depression. It isn’t always clear whether alcohol is causing symptoms of depression because alcohol is a natural depressant. However, it is known to make the symptoms worse.

Also, medications prescribed for depression shouldn’t be mixed with alcohol as they can interact. Some anti-depressants increase the risk of a relapse, so you should consult with your doctor if you have previously had issues with alcohol.

As a depressant, alcohol can also reduce your inhibitions as well as make negative emotions worse. This means that it can lead to impulsive actions. For someone who experiences suicidal ideation or who has considered self-harm, this can be very dangerous. Even if you wouldn’t harm yourself when sober, you may do so when influenced by alcohol.

Alcohol and Psychosis

Extremely heavy drinking can have permanent and drastic effects on the brain, potentially causing psychosis. A very heavy drinker can experience psychosis when they’re intoxicated or when they’re in withdrawal.

If you suffer from psychosis or are at risk of a psychotic episode, heavy drinking can make your symptoms far more difficult to manage. You may be more likely to harm yourself or others, especially when your inhibitions are lowered by alcohol.

So Does Alcohol Cause Mental Illness?

While alcohol might not directly cause mental illness it definitely exasperates it. So if you or a family member suspect that your drinking is affecting your mental illness, you should seek help. [Treatment plans](#) can be designed for your circumstances. Whether you require [partial hospitalization](#), [intensive outpatient](#) care, or [outpatient](#) care, you can get the help you need.

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