Think yo🍺r know your drink?

Alcohol and mental wellbeing at work. Alcohol and mental health are often connected and both employers and managers should be mindful of the support that some employees may need.

Many people don't realise that heavy drinking is very common among people with mental health issues[1].

People experiencing anxiety, depression, or other mental illnesses often use alcohol as a way to feel better and to reduce difficult feelings or thoughts[2].

In addition, for some people, drinking heavily can cause depression, anxiety and restlessness, as alcohol is a depressant and disturbs good sleep patterns.

Either way round, employees may need support for both their mental wellbeing and their drinking issues.

What's the connection between alcohol and mental health?

Many people get a 'buzz' from drinking and alcohol is also commonly used to unwind and reduce stress at the end of a long day.

Due to its addictive properties, alcohol can also sometimes be over-relied upon to manage stress, rather than dealing with it through more positive action.

Some people end up in a vicious cycle of drinking more and more to relieve stress and depression, even though the alcohol is actually contributing to it.
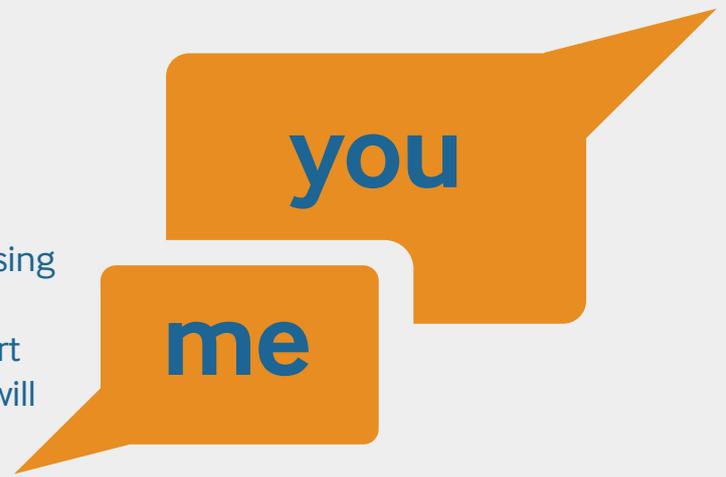
How alcohol issues might appear at work

Employees may be increasingly absent from work, or they may be excessively late. They may have lowered job efficiency or friction with other employees/customers and exhibit unusual behaviour, such as temper tantrums, emotional outbursts. They may come to work smelling of alcohol or have signs of intoxication such as slurred speech.

What employers and managers can do

Employers have a duty of care to help anyone whose drinking or mental health issues are causing them difficulties. Employees with alcohol and mental health issues are unlikely to seek support from their employer unless it is very clear they will be fully supported to get better.

Some key steps can help raise awareness and encourage good health and wellbeing:

- **Make sure you have a clear policy on drinking before or at work**

- **Be clear that employees with alcohol and/or mental health issues will get the support they need**

- **Raise awareness among managers and employees about the links between alcohol and mental health**

- **Create a positive culture at work that doesn't revolve around drinking**

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Where to get help for an alcohol issue with employees

- **Alcohol Health Network** can advise on how to manage alcohol issues in the workplace

- **The employee's GP** will be best placed to support with medical/health issues

- In emergencies, always **call 999**

References:

[1] Mental Health Foundation, Cheers? Understanding the relationship between alcohol and mental health, 2006

[2] Royal College Psychiatrists: Alcohol Our Favourite Drug 2013
(http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/alcoholourfavouritedrug.aspx)accessed February 2016

Alcohol Health Network provides alcohol policy and strategy advice for employers — and can advise on creating an 'alcohol aware' workplace to complement mental health awareness.

We provide a range of alcohol harm reduction services including policy advice, health stalls, employee and manager training, online health checks and counselling.

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NHS Lower Risk Guidelines
Do not regularly drink more than:

14 units per week

14 units per week

It's safest not to drink alcohol

(Don't save up your units for just 1-2 days)

(**Drink-free days** are a good way to cut down)

Alcohol
Health
Network

Awareness, Prevention & Support