

Be nice to Brain.  
Drink less.

# What you need to know about alcohol and anxiety



## Key facts

- Alcohol has a negative impact on your mental health.
- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health condition in Australia.
- Cutting back or cutting out alcohol can help to relieve anxiety and improve your mental health.
- “Hangxiety” is that feeling of heightened anxiety after drinking alcohol.

Many things can affect your mental health and wellbeing – alcohol is one factor. The link between alcohol and mental health is complex. How alcohol affects mental health varies from person to person. It can involve how your body responds to alcohol as well as social changes caused by drinking.<sup>1</sup> Some people are more likely to develop mental health concerns and problems with alcohol.<sup>2</sup>

Drinking alcohol can have a negative effect on your mood, thoughts and feelings. Over time it can contribute to the development, or worsening of, mental health conditions such as anxiety. Cutting back or cutting out alcohol can boost your energy, improve your mood and build positive mental health.

## The link between alcohol and anxiety

Alcohol is a depressant that disrupts the chemical balance in our brains. It slows down the brain and central nervous system.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup> In the short-term, this can make you feel less inhibited and more relaxed. These effects wear off quickly and can leave you feeling worse than before.

Good brain function relies on a balance of chemicals and processes that help regulate thoughts and feelings. Over time, alcohol use can deplete the chemicals in our brains that naturally help reduce anxiety and deal with stressful situations.<sup>4</sup>

The term “hangxiety” refers to the feelings of increased anxiety that many people have in the hours and days after drinking alcohol.<sup>6</sup>

After the effects of alcohol wear off, your brain needs to work hard to restore the balance of chemicals required for proper function. The process required to restore the balance means that your brain doesn’t have access to the chemicals that help us to deal with anxiety.

These feelings of hangxiety mirror symptoms of anxiety disorders and can last hours or days. The feelings can also worsen over time with sustained alcohol use.

**If you’re unsure whether your alcohol intake is affecting your mental health, talking to your GP is the first step towards finding out.**





## What is anxiety?

Anxiety affects 1 in 4 adults and is the most common mental health concern in Australia. Anxiety conditions can affect your thoughts and feelings, as well as cause physical symptoms.

Anxiety can cause feelings of excessive worry, nervousness and irritability. It may cause you to overthink and assume the worst is going to happen. The physical effects can include a racing heart, breathing difficulties, dizziness and nausea.

Feeling anxious is something everyone experiences from time to time. It is one of the ways the body tries to keep you safe. Feelings of anxiety usually come and go, but for some people those feelings can remain for long periods and/or they may experience them in situations where you wouldn't expect to feel anxious. If this starts to happen, it can have a big impact on our everyday lives and may be an indicator of an anxiety disorder.<sup>7, 8</sup>

Whether you already experience anxiety or feelings of anxiety are new to you, alcohol can make things worse. Alcohol can worsen anxiety symptoms by causing:

- Sleep problems
- Feelings of worry and/or panic
- Feelings of guilt or remorse
- Low moods
- Lack of energy or motivation
- Withdrawal from social activities and/or hobbies

## Seeking help for anxiety

If feelings of anxiety remain for an extended period and start to interfere with your everyday life, this is a sign that you might need some support.<sup>5</sup> When feeling this way, it is important to seek help from a health professional such as a GP.

A GP will help you understand what is happening with your anxiety and mental health more generally. They can also help rule out any physical causes for how you are feeling. When you see a GP, they will spend time understanding how you have been feeling and may recommend some options. Together with the GP, you can create a plan that might include various treatments and building on healthy habits that can help ease your anxiety.

## Tips for managing anxiety

While the input and support of health professionals is key to treating anxiety, there are some things you can do for yourself. Some tips to help ease anxiety and build positive mental health include:

- Cut back or stop drinking alcohol and other drugs
- Regular exercise
- Regular social connection
- Good nutrition
- Good sleep habits
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Breathing techniques

**For more tips on how to cut back on alcohol, information on alcohol and anxiety, and a list of support services visit [benicetobrain.org.au](https://benicetobrain.org.au)**

1 Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. [What are the effects of alcohol?](#)

2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. [Mental Health and substance use.](#)

3 Mental Health Foundation. [Alcohol and mental health](#)

4 National Center for Biotechnology Information. [Alcohol and Neurotransmitter Interactions. Alcohol and Neurotransmitter Interactions - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

5 Alcohol. Think Again. [Effects Of Alcohol On Mental Health Australia | Alcohol Think Again](#)

6 Queensland Health. [Hangxiety: why alcohol can leave you feeling anxious | Queensland Health](#)

7 Black Dog Institute. [Anxiety - Information & Resources - Black Dog Institute | Better Mental Health](#)

8 Drinkaware. [Alcohol and anxiety: Panic Attacks After Drinking | Drinkaware](#)