

Alcohol Use & First-Episode Psychosis

Drinking is a normal part of many young people's lives — but alcohol has a complicated relationship with psychosis. This sheet explains what's going on and what might help.

"Using alcohol to take the edge off when things feel hard is understandable. But alcohol and psychosis don't mix well — and knowing why can make a real difference to your recovery."

SOMETHING TO KNOW

Alcohol is often used by young people with FEP — often to cope with symptoms, stress, or the social pressure to drink.

WHY IT MATTERS

Alcohol directly interferes with how your medication works — making it less effective at reducing symptoms.

THE GOOD NEWS

Cutting back on alcohol tends to make symptoms easier to manage — and support is available to help you do that.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

- 1 Alcohol can trigger or worsen psychotic symptoms.** Alcohol disrupts brain chemistry in ways that can bring paranoia, hallucinations, and confused thinking — even in people who don't have a history of psychosis. For someone in early psychosis, this effect is stronger.
- 2 It can make your medication less effective.** Alcohol can interfere with how antipsychotic medications work in your body. This can mean symptoms return or worsen even if you've been doing well on your medication.
- 3 It can cause dangerous side effects when combined with medication.** Mixing alcohol with antipsychotics increases sedation, dizziness, and the risk of falling. Some combinations carry more serious risks. Your prescriber can tell you what applies to your medication.
- 4 It creates a cycle that's hard to break.** Alcohol can make symptoms worse, which can lead to drinking more to cope, which worsens symptoms further. It can also make it harder to remember to take medication consistently.

WHAT MIGHT HELP

BE HONEST WITH YOUR CARE TEAM

Telling your team how much you drink isn't about getting in trouble — it helps them get your medication and support right. They've heard it before and won't judge you.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO STOP ALL AT ONCE

If you drink regularly, stopping suddenly can be risky. Talk to your team about cutting down safely — they can help you do it in a way that works for you.

FIND OUT WHAT APPLIES TO YOUR MEDICATION

Some medications interact with alcohol more than others. Ask your prescriber or pharmacist exactly what the risks are for what you're taking in. It's a completely normal question.

THINK ABOUT WHY YOU'RE DRINKING

Many people drink to manage anxiety, loneliness, or the pressure of social situations. If alcohol helps you cope, there are other things that can help too — ask your team what's available.

This isn't about willpower

Using alcohol to cope when things are hard makes sense in the short term. Understanding what is driving alcohol use is a much better starting point than blame.

Social pressure is real

Feeling like you must drink to fit in is genuinely hard, especially when you're young. It's okay to say no, and your team can help you think through how.

Don't stop suddenly if you drink heavily

If alcohol is a regular part of your life, stopping abruptly can cause withdrawal symptoms. Talk to your team first — they can help you reduce use safely.