

## Drinking causes problems in the workplace

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Alcohol causes many of society's overt problems such as violence and crime. But, society's more subtle personal problems such as relationship breakdowns, stress, depression, and anxiety; and work-related problems such as absenteeism, conflict with colleagues, and work stress are also often alcohol related.

A US benchmark study conducted in 1984 indicates that nearly 30% of adults are alcohol dependant or alcohol abusers at some time in their lives. But alarmingly, significantly more people, who are not defined as alcohol dependent or 'alcoholics', regularly drink at hazardous levels. This can cause them not only physical harm, but can also create many personal and work-related problems.

Often, these problems and hazardous drinking co-exist in ways that are complexly interwoven.

If formal treatment is required, a psychologist may work with a person to cope with work-related stress, as well as change their alcohol consumption or drinking behaviour.

However, the workplace is ideally placed to identify these problems and help people to manage their alcohol consumption thereby improving their individual and work performance.

Workplaces can begin by distributing as much information as possible about low risk drinking. Some low-risk drinking guidelines include:

- Have at least three alcohol free days per week.
- On drinking days, men should drink no more than four standard drinks and women no more than two.
- Don't 'save' drinks for the weekend.

Some low-risk drinking tips include:

- If you drink beer, change to a mid-strength or light beer.
- Avoid keeping beer or wine in the fridge and only buy as much as your personal drinking limit allows.
- Ensure you eat when you drink, but avoid salty foods.

Drink a 'spacer' (non-alcoholic drink) between each drink.

Avoid getting into 'shouts'.

Many people work with a psychologist individually to change these behaviours. Group information sessions at workplaces explaining the effects of alcohol can also be helpful for staff. For more information, please contact us.