**Alcohol and Depression – A Dangerous Combination**

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Abusing alcohol and depression often go hand in hand, and it’s not a good combination. Alcohol, contrary to what many people believe, is a depressant. Many people believe it to have stimulant qualities because the first drink or two of alcohol will often make a person feel more upbeat or excited. You might think that a few drinks will make you feel more relaxed and less stressed. Biologically, however, this is untrue. Alcohol depresses the brain and nervous system and lowers serotonin and norepinephrine levels.

**Alcohol and depression do not mix well. Here are some of the reasons:**

* While alcohol may make you feel less stressed or depressed temporarily, people generally feel worse after it wears off.
* There can be dangerous interactions between alcohol and medications used for depression. This can include over-the-counter medications as well.
* Alcohol is a depressant and can make depression more severe.
* Alcohol makes you feel less inhibited and affects your judgment, which can cause you to make bad decisions.
* Alcohol affects one’s judgment.
* Alcohol negatively affects your quality of sleep.
* Alcohol can cause or worsen other health problems such as liver disease (in the form of hepatitis, cirrhosis, and liver failure), irregular heartbeat, sexual difficulties, ulcers, etc.
* Alcohol can also make you more violent and aggressive.
* Alcohol can make you more sensitive and prone to sadness.
* Ultimately, alcohol can, and often does, cause you to engage in actions that they otherwise would not.

While these side effects and symptoms can happen to people drinking alcohol even if they aren’t depressed, depression or medications used for depression can exacerbate these effects.

**Other Facts About Alcohol and Depression**

* [Research shows](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1810582/) that there is an association between folate deficiency and depression. The use of alcohol can lower folic acid levels.
* The depression caused by alcohol increases as the blood-alcohol concentration increases.
* Some people are genetically predisposed to depression, and alcohol use can trigger that.

Research shows that genetics play an essential role in both depression and the abuse of alcohol. If you have a family history of either one, you are more likely to develop one or both of these conditions.

Of course, there’s more than genetics that is involved. Your upbringing, home, and social environment can also play a significant role in determining whether you experience depression, alcoholism, or both. Abused children and children raised in poverty are more likely to experience depression or have a drinking problem. Children and teens who have had an episode of major depression are more likely to start drinking alcohol.

Women seem to have more of a tendency than men to start drinking after becoming depressed. These are only a few of the variables that can factor into whether a person develops a depression and alcohol problem.

**Does Depression Cause Alcohol Abuse? Does Alcohol Abuse Cause Depression?**

It is controversial as to whether alcohol abuse causes depression or depression causes alcohol abuse. It appears that both can be true. If you suffer from depression, you are more likely to drink alcohol in an unhealthy manner, which can just make your depression worse. If you are abusing alcohol, it can trigger a genetic predisposition to depression, making your alcoholism and depression more severe.

If you suffer from depression and alcoholism, treatment will be most successful if the treatment plan addresses both conditions. It is very important to seek treatment from someone or an institution experienced in treating both disorders simultaneously. Individuals who suffer from depression and alcoholism are at greater risk of having car accidents, attempting suicide, and engaging in other harmful or high-risk activities. The two conditions together can make a person much more impulsive and certainly can impair judgment. In other words, the two combined can be deadly.

**Signs of Depression**

* Feeling hopeless and helpless
* Loss of interest in typical day-to-day activities
* Loss of feelings of joy and pleasure
* Weight loss or weight gain. Change in appetite
* Difficulty sleeping **or**excessive sleeping
* Irritable, restless, low tolerance, agitated or on edge
* Fatigue, feeling incapable of doing even simple things
* Feeling worthless
* Very critical of self
* Difficulty concentrating
* Difficulty making decisions
* Forgetfulness
* Headaches, stomach pain, back pain, painful muscles

**Signs of Alcohol Abuse**

* Neglecting responsibilities
* Drinking and driving
* Mixing alcohol with prescription medication
* Repeated legal problems from drinking
* Problems in relationships related to drinking
* Drinking to relax or de-stress
* Drinking alcohol as a response to worry and problems
* Drinking too much much alcohol at one time
* Drinking alcohol too often
* Using alcohol to help you sleep
* Drinking excessive alcohol alone
* Feeling guilty because of your drinking

Many people might exhibit one or more of these signs, but that doesn’t necessarily make them an alcoholic. It’s important to see the bigger picture. Many of us have a few drinks to unwind or have had a little bit too much to drink and didn’t feel so great the next morning. This doesn’t make someone an alcoholic. When these things are persistent and really start to affect someone’s life negatively, and they still won’t stop drinking, that’s when it can become quite problematic.

When you put the two lists together and see that alcohol is being used in an attempt to self-treat symptoms of depression or a loved one’s drinking habits increase and the signs of depression start to appear, then you should get help right away.

**Treatment for Alcohol and Depression**

If you or a loved one has concerns about alcohol or depression or both, immediately seek help. There are many different types of alcohol treatment programs. The treatment program can include individual counseling, detoxification, medication, and inpatient or intensive outpatient rehabilitation. Also, don’t forget about the importance of a healthy diet, exercise, meditation, yoga, and other holistic treatments, which can be very beneficial for many people. It is helpful to find some sort of treatment that will address both your alcohol issues as well as your depression.