



# ABI and substance abuse

People with a brain injury are more likely to develop drug and alcohol dependency due to depression, boredom, social isolation, impulsivity or lack of self-awareness. After a brain injury, alcohol and drugs have a more powerful effect due to the loss of brain cells. More alcohol or drugs go to the fewer existing cells, increasing the impact of the alcohol or drugs on that person's ability to function.

While people may 'forget' their problems for a while by drinking alcohol or using drugs, this generally makes their problems worse, disrupting family life, relationships, school or employment, health and finances.

## How it effects daily life

People who begin or continue using alcohol or other drugs after a brain injury don't recover as quickly or as completely. Because they lost brain cells in the injury, the remaining cells must work harder for the person to do some of the same activities they did before the injury.

If these remaining cells are affected by alcohol or drugs, they won't be able to take over the duties of the dead cells.

Consuming even moderate amounts of alcohol for people with a mild brain injury is associated with negative neurological effects, and can worsen problems such as concentration and memory problems, impulsivity, socially inappropriate behaviour, depression, and coordination. Alcohol and drugs can increase the risk of seizure if medication is combined with alcohol, as well as increase the likelihood of incurring another brain injury.

## What can I do?

### Tips for managing drug and alcohol dependency

Counsellors can provide information and possible approaches, as there are many issues to address including managing difficult behaviour, how much support to provide and responding to various situations.

Those with drug problems generally experience a series of stages in dealing with their use, as illustrated here in the 'States of Change' Model in Drug Dependency.

#### Pre-contemplation

A person doesn't want to change or accept that they have a problem

#### What to do:

- keep communication open, but don't discuss the need to change
- focus on harm minimisation with their existing drug use. How can they use the drug most safely?

#### Contemplation

A person is thinking about changing their drug use. Maybe stuck between wanting to change or stay the same

#### What to do:

- assist them to explore their thoughts on their drug use, however don't indicate one way or the other your preferred choice for them

#### Decision

A person makes the decision to change and is thinking about how to do this

#### What to do:

- talk to them about what they want to do and explore the options available.
- assist them with developing an action plan how they will carry this out



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## What can I do? continued

### Action

This could involve entering treatment, changing their environment or reducing/ceasing drug use. It may not mean abstinence from drug use

#### What to do:

- recognise the action as positive, don't focus on the negative if they slip back,
- encourage their belief that change is within their capabilities

### Maintenance

A person must maintain the changes to their life.

#### What to do:

- work with them on plans to minimise risk to relapse and express your belief in them to manage their own life.

- support other areas of their life such as work, studies, hobbies, relationships, etc

### Relapse

A person may fall back into drug use behaviour. Patience is required - drug users can go through the cycle a few times, and a brain injury can make relapse more likely.

#### What to do:

- don't panic, and see relapse as a short-term obstacle, not a waste of hard work.
- encourage the person to see this as a mistake that can be learned from, not a sign that it's an impossible situation

## Please remember you are not alone.

Headwest's trained and compassionate advocates understand what clients, their Carers and family are facing. Let us help you to gain access to the best services for you following an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).

**Our service is free and confidential**

**Freecall: 1800 626 370**

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