Risky Substances

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF Lifestyle Medicine

It is well known that **tobacco** use and drinking too much **alcohol** increases the risk of many chronic diseases and death. And the inappropriate use of mind-altering substances (**drugs**) can be associated with serious behavioral, cognitive, and physiological problems.

Treatments for people caught in a cycle of habitual use or exposure to risky behaviors take time, different approaches and many attempts. Patience as well as getting support from others is an important part of reaching your goals.

Effective Treatment Models



- Mental health treatment to help resolve underlying triggers, which may include counseling (individual or support groups)
- Medication-assisted therapies
- Use of other lifestyle medicine pillars (decreasing stress through exercise, healthy eating, improved sleep, decreasing stress through meditation and mindfulness, and improving social relationships)
- Combination of treatments with multiple modalities including support with medication.

Slips and relapses are normal and considered part of the change process. Goal setting, support and persistence is key!



A Note on Alcohol

The 2025 US Surgeon General Report on Alcohol and Cancer highlights alcohol use as a leading preventable cause of cancer in the United States with the more alcohol consumed, the greater the risk for seven different types of cancer. This suggests there is no safe level of alcohol consumption. Furthermore, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which is the specialized cancer agency of the World Health Organization (WHO), classifies alcohol as a Group 1 carcinogen, the highest level of classification available.

The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults of legal drinking age can choose not to drink, or to drink in moderation by limiting intake to 2 drinks or less in a day for men or 1 drink or less in a day for women, on days when alcohol is consumed.

Measurements:

One standard alcoholic drink in US:

12 oz beer

5 oz table wine

1.5 oz of 80-proof spirits

Goals for Avoiding Risky Substances

Setting goals around substance use (tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs) is a great way to start making changes. An example of a goal is, "I will swap my morning cigarette with chewing gum at least 5 days this week for the next four weeks. I will ask my partner to help keep me on track and use the free texting service for more support."

Specific - What would you like to decrease/change?

Measurable - How much or how many will you decrease or change?

Achievable - Will you be inspired or overwhelmed by this goal?

Realistic - Can you visualize success? (think about improvement over perfection)

Time-bound - How often or for how long will you make this change?

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