



**Independent
Age**



Understanding alcohol and drug misuse



Thank you

We would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed it for us. Our special thanks go to Mind for their expert knowledge during the review.

What do you think?

We welcome your feedback on our publications. We use your comments to plan future changes.

If you'd like to help us develop our information products, you can join our Readers' Panel. To find out more, call **020 7050 6560** or visit **independentage.org/readers-panel**.

Our publications

In this guide you'll find references to our other free publications. To order them, call **0800 319 6789** or visit **independentage.org/publications**.

If you would like this information in a different format – such as large print or audio CD – call us on **0800 319 6789** or email **operations@independentage.org**.

While we make every reasonable effort to ensure that our information is accurate at the time of publication, we do not accept any liability arising from its use. Our information should not be used as a substitute for professional advice. The inclusion of other organisations does not constitute an endorsement from us.

The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

© Independent Age 2022

Author: Independent Age

Production: Independent Age

Design: Mark Errington

Photography: Centre for Ageing Better cover, p3, 6, 9, 13, 17, 20, 26, 32, 34, 35, 36, 43, 44

Contents

About this guide	2
1. What is alcohol and drug misuse?	3
2. How you might be affected	9
3. Where to get support	13
4. Ways to help yourself	26
5. If you're worried about someone	34
6. Useful contacts	39
Harry's story	44

Date of publication: September 2022

Next review date: July 2024

We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout. We have changed the names of some of the interviewees who wished to be anonymous. Some of the images seen throughout this guide are posed by friends of Independent Age.

The PIF TICK is the UK-wide Quality Mark for Health Information.

About this guide

Changes to our bodies in later life make us more sensitive to the effects of drugs and alcohol. This means that even moderate use can become a problem for some of us. Over time, this can have an impact on many areas of life.

Although only a small number of people are affected, the harmful use of alcohol and drugs is increasing among older people.

This guide explains the risks and gives information about the help available. If you're affected by alcohol or drug misuse, there are effective treatments and sources of support.



In this guide, you'll find references to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789**, or by visiting **independentage.org/publications**.



1. What is alcohol and drug misuse?

When we drink or take drugs in a way that is harmful to us, this is called misuse.

1. What is alcohol and drug misuse?

All kinds of alcohol and drug misuse can be harmful. The drugs that older people most commonly misuse are alcohol, prescribed painkillers and medication for anxiety and sleep problems. Alcohol is the most common.

Many of us like to have a drink sometimes or use recreational drugs such as cannabis or cocaine. This might be something you've done once or twice, or something you do regularly. You might also need to take lots of medication. But when you use these substances in a way that causes harm, it can affect your mental or physical health.

See **chapter 4** for more on understanding the risks.

What leads to alcohol and drug misuse?

There are lots of reasons why we might misuse alcohol or drugs. Some people turn to them to help them cope with difficult times, such as the life changes that may come with old age – for example, bereavement, retirement, ill health or mobility problems.

If you're lonely and isolated, you may use alcohol or drugs to help you deal with boredom or depression. You may use them if you can't sleep well or you're in pain. You might lose track of how your medication should be taken.

Drug and alcohol misuse is often a hidden problem for older people. You might feel ashamed and reluctant to ask for help. You may not be aware that there's a problem. If you're not coming into contact with other people, it can go unnoticed.

It can also be missed by health professionals, who may assume your problem is the result of another health issue such as depression or dementia. They might not think to ask you about your alcohol and drug use. This can make it difficult to access treatment services.

“ When you're at home on your own drinking, the outside world doesn't see you and you can cover it up in the early stages.

1. What is alcohol and drug misuse?

Signs that you may have a problem

To begin with, drinking or drugs may make you feel good or help to relieve stress or pain. However, the feelings of relief are only temporary and, if you continue to use alcohol or drugs in this way, you risk becoming dependent on them.

Dependency starts when you crave the feelings of pleasure or 'high' and have a strong urge to repeat the experience. The more you do this, the more alcohol or drugs you need to get the same effect. This is called building tolerance. It can also take longer for the effects to start.



If you're worried, ask yourself the following:

- Do you find it difficult to set limits or to stop yourself drinking or using drugs, even if you want to or you're experiencing unpleasant side effects?
- Have you been taking a prescription drug for longer than you were advised?
- Have you mixed prescription medication with other drugs or alcohol when you've been told not to?
- Have you lost interest in things you used to enjoy because of drinking or drugs?
- Do you have trouble managing your daily life – for example, washing, cooking, cleaning?
- Do you spend a lot of time thinking about alcohol or drugs?
- Is drinking or drug use affecting your relationships with those around you?
- Have your family or friends raised concerns about your drug or alcohol use?
- Have you had an accident, such as a fall or injury, while drinking alcohol or using drugs?

If you answered yes to some of those questions, you might want to talk to a health professional such as your GP.

1. What is alcohol and drug misuse?

Long-term effects

Addiction is when the substance becomes the most important thing in your life and you feel you cannot function without it. A big part of your life will revolve around seeking it, taking it and recovering from its effects.

You may experience withdrawal symptoms if you try to stop, such as tremors, sweating, nausea, irritability, depression, anxiety, problems sleeping and, in extreme cases, hallucinations and seizures. This happens because repeated use causes changes to the brain. Drugs and/or alcohol then become the focus of your everyday life.

It isn't a question of 'willpower' – addiction is an illness – but with the right support, you can recover.

If you're worried about your alcohol or drug use, see **chapter 3** for where you can get help.



2. How you might be affected

Alcohol and drug misuse can harm your physical and mental health, cause difficulties in your daily life and affect the people around you.

2. How you might be affected

The impact of drug and alcohol use varies from person to person.

Your physical health

You become more at risk of:

- problems with your balance, which could lead to falls and injury
- incontinence
- problems sleeping and tiredness during the day
- blackouts or fits
- medical conditions such as high blood pressure, cancer, liver disease, heart disease or stroke
- other medication you've been prescribed not working as well as it should
- loss of appetite, which could lead to malnutrition
- brain damage, which can increase your risk of conditions like dementia.

Your mental health

Your mental health describes your emotional wellbeing – how you think, feel and react. All drugs and alcohol have some effect on your mental health, changing your mood and the way you see things.

The effects depend on what you're using but could lead to:

- anxiety – especially as the effects of the substance wear off, making you want more to curb this feeling
- depression
- confusion
- memory problems.

“ I used to have a good job, plenty of money, could buy any car I wanted, big house, wife and kids. Drink took over and I have ended up with no job, no wife, I don't see the kids, and no money.

2. How you might be affected

You can find out more about the effects of alcohol on your physical and mental health on the NHS website ([nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/risks](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/risks)). To find out more about the short- and long-term effects of a specific drug, contact FRANK, the national drugs service (**0300 123 6600**, [talktofrank.com](https://www.talktofrank.com)).

For information and advice about alcohol and dementia, contact the Alzheimer's Society (**0333 150 3456**, [alzheimers.org.uk](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk)) or Alzheimer Scotland (**0808 808 3000**, [alzscot.org](https://www.alzscot.org)).

Your daily life

Drug and alcohol misuse can have a serious impact on every aspect of your life, including your relationships, finances and housing.

You may neglect yourself and your everyday tasks. You may lose independence if misuse leads to falls or health problems. You could risk losing your home if you can't maintain it properly or keep up with rent or mortgage payments.

See **chapter 3** and **chapter 6** for where you can get support.



3. Where to get support

It may be hard to admit that you have a problem – you may feel embarrassed or ashamed – but there are many ways you can get help.

3. Where to get support

You can prevent the serious consequences of drug and alcohol misuse by seeking help early. It may seem that others are nagging you, but they are usually genuinely concerned that you receive the help and support that you need.

Ask for help

If you're worried about the way you're using drugs or alcohol, or the way they are affecting you, start by talking to your GP – even if you're just a little bit worried.

Be honest about how much and how often you're drinking or using drugs. This will make it easier to get the right support.

If necessary, your GP can refer you for specialist assessment or treatment.

“ Take the first step. It's probably the hardest thing you've ever done but talk to someone and save your life.

If you're not comfortable talking to your GP, you can contact local treatment services yourself. You can find a directory of drug treatment services on the FRANK website or call the helpline (**0300 123 6600**, **talktofrank.com/get-help/find-support-near-you**).

You can also find drug services on the NHS website:

- in England – **nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Information-and-support-for-drug-misuse/LocationSearch/339**
- in Scotland – **nhs24.scot**
- in Wales – **111.wales.nhs.uk**.

For alcohol support services, visit **nhs.uk/nhs-services/find-alcohol-addiction-support-services** or call Drinkline – a free, confidential helpline – on **0300 123 1110** or Drinkline Scotland on **0800 731 4314**.

Getting support that meets your needs

If you have particular support needs because of your cultural or religious background, mention this when you're being referred – for example, if you need to see a male or female health professional, or someone from the same background. Mind has some information about this at **mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/racism-and-mental-health/#WaysToSupportYourMentalHealth**.

3. Where to get support

You have a right to receive information in an accessible format if you need it – for example, large print, audio or braille – or to get support from an interpreter.

Advocacy

If you need help to express yourself or you're finding it difficult to get the support you need, you may benefit from the help of an independent advocate. Ask your local council for details of advocacy services in your area or contact:

- the Older People's Advocacy Alliance (**opaal.org.uk**)
- the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (**0131 510 9410, siaa.org.uk**)
- your local Community Health Council in Wales (**029 2023 5558, boardchc.nhs.wales/your-local-chc**).

In some situations, you may have a legal right to an advocate.



For more information, see our factsheet
**Helping you get your voice heard:
Independent advocacy.**



Types of treatment

Your treatment will depend on what you're using and what you want to achieve. You might just want help to cut down or you may need to stop completely.

If you're referred for treatment, you may be asked to give a urine or saliva sample (for drug use) or have a blood test (for alcohol and/or drug use). It's important to be honest about your drinking or drug use. For example, if you're prescribed medication, it could interact with whatever you're using.

3. Where to get support

“ I was diagnosed as having type 2 diabetes. The practice nurse gave me advice on how to improve it. She was very good and very direct about the damage I was doing to myself. I made the decision to go to Alcoholics Anonymous myself as I was drinking about 45 units a week.

If you're referred to a local drug and alcohol treatment service, you should be given a keyworker who will make a care plan with you and see you on a regular basis.

Treatment may include:

- **psychological or talking therapies**, such as counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which can help change the way you think and act. This may be one to one or in groups

- **detoxification (detox) treatments** to help you stop drinking or using drugs. You may be able to do this at home if your symptoms are mild, but older people might be advised to do this in a hospital or clinic
- **medication** – you may need medication to control cravings or to help with withdrawal symptoms, which could include anxiety, sweating, tremors or nausea. For example, you may be prescribed medication that gives you an unpleasant reaction when you drink.

Private treatment is also available but can be very expensive. You may be able to get a referral through the NHS.

You may need a combination of treatments. You should be offered help to deal with other problems that might have caused you to start using in the first place or that have been made worse by it.



See our guides **Managing anxiety**, **Dealing with depression** and **Coping with bereavement** for more information about the support available if you've been affected by these issues.

3. Where to get support



“ I had huge support from NHS psychology services in the form of both individual and group therapy. Talking about how I was feeling and why I wanted to use was the first step in getting back some control and resuming ‘normal life’.

Charities and support groups

Some of us find charities or support groups helpful in dealing with alcohol or drug misuse. Your GP or NHS services should give you information about these groups and services.

You may be given support to attend for the first time, such as help arranging an appointment or transport if you have mobility problems, or someone to go with you.

Charities and support groups will have different approaches, so you might need to find one that is right for you. For example, groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous are usually for people who want to stop completely and have a specific programme to follow.

See **chapter 6** for contact details of organisations that may be able to help.

Aftercare

Drug and alcohol dependency is a long-term condition and relapse is a common part of the recovery process. It's understandable if you start misusing drugs or alcohol again after starting recovery. If you're affected by relapse, you might want to seek ongoing support.

3. Where to get support

“ If I look at the consequences of starting to drink or take drugs again, they are not good. In reality, my only option now is to stay off the booze and weed if I want to stay alive.

Rehabilitation and recovery programmes can help you stay on track. Speak to your keyworker or see **chapter 6** for useful contacts.

Support for other mental health problems

If you have other mental health problems and you misuse drugs or alcohol, you may be given what's known as a 'dual diagnosis'. If you have severe mental health problems, mental health services should be responsible for your treatment.

You may be offered a range of services, depending on your situation, including support with housing and benefits. Rethink Mental Illness can give you more information about dual diagnosis and what to do if you have trouble accessing services (**0808 801 0525**, **rethink.org**).

Help with practical problems

If you're finding it difficult to look after yourself, make sure you're getting enough support. Start by asking your local council for a care needs assessment. This will look at how you manage everyday activities like getting dressed and preparing food, and whether you need help.

You can find contact details in the phone book or on [gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services](https://www.gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services).



Our guide **Getting help at home** has more details.

If you have money worries, make sure you're claiming all the benefits you're entitled to. You could use our online benefits calculator (**independentage.org/benefit-calculator**) or call our Helpline (**0800 319 6789**) to arrange a benefits check.



Our free **Moneywise** guide has more information about the help available.

If you need advice about benefits or social care, contact the Independent Age Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

3. Where to get support

Managing pain

Your GP should be able to help you if you're struggling with pain. If you've become addicted to a prescription drug, such as an opioid painkiller, you may need another way to deal with pain.

Your GP may refer you to a pain clinic, where you could be offered a pain management programme.

You can also get information from organisations such as the British Pain Society (**020 7269 7840**, **britishpainsociety.org**) or Pain Support (**painsupport.co.uk**), which has useful resources and an online forum. Or you could try the online Pain Toolkit (**paintoolkit.org**).



See our guide **Living well with long-term health conditions** for more information.

Managing your medication

It can be difficult to keep track of your medication, especially if you're taking more than one. If you're concerned about any medication you're taking, speak to your GP or pharmacist.

You may be entitled to a Medicines Use Review with your pharmacist if you have a long-term condition or you're taking more than one medication. In Scotland, you may be able to get support from the Medicines, Care and Review Service.

If you've become addicted to a prescribed medication, make sure your GP records the information so you're not prescribed the same medication again in future.

Buying medication online

Many people go online to buy prescription medication, but this can be dangerous. The medication may be of poor quality or unsuitable for you and you could risk side effects or serious health problems.

Make sure the seller is registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council and registered in the UK. It's illegal for a website to sell prescription medication to you without a prescription.



4. Ways to help yourself

As well as seeking support, there are many things you can do to help yourself.

Understand the risks

It's important to be aware of the risks of drinking or taking illegal, prescription or over-the-counter drugs.

Government guidelines suggest that men and women shouldn't regularly drink more than 14 units per week. However, even these amounts may be too much for older people. Ask your GP or other health professionals for advice about safe drinking.

It can be difficult to work out how many units you're drinking. It depends on the strength of the alcohol and the size of the glass, for example. You can find calculators online to help you work out whether you're at risk, such as [alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/interactive-tools/unit-calculator](https://www.alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/interactive-tools/unit-calculator) and [count14.scot](https://www.count14.scot).

“ Sometimes in the pub I stick to just one drink of wine, but as soon as I get home, I start drinking and don't know when to stop.

4. Ways to help yourself

What is a unit?*

Lager/beer/cider



Can (440ml)

2 UNITS

4.5% ABV**



Bottle (330ml)

1.7 UNITS

5% ABV



Pint (regular)

2 UNITS

3.6% ABV



Pint (strong)

3 UNITS

5.2% ABV

Wine (white/red/rosé)



Standard (135ml)

2.1 UNITS

12% ABV



Large (250ml)

3 UNITS

12% ABV

Spirits



Shot (25ml)

1 UNIT

40% ABV

*A UK unit is 10ml of pure alcohol.

**ABV = alcohol by volume.

If you want to know more about prescription drugs or over-the-counter medication, you can find information on the electronic Medicines Compendium (eMC) ([medicines.org.uk/emc](https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc)) or ask your pharmacist.

Read the written information that comes with your medication and keep it safe for future reference. Mixing alcohol and other drugs can be dangerous.

You can get detailed information about recreational drugs and their effects from organisations such as FRANK or Mind. See **chapter 6** for contact details.

Look after yourself

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and staying physically active can help with your recovery. Find other ways to relax and cope with stress.

Relaxation techniques and breathing exercises can help you to feel calmer. You can find breathing exercises on the NHS website at [nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress). Mind also has tips to help with your mental wellbeing at [mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/wellbeing/wellbeing](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/wellbeing/wellbeing).

4. Ways to help yourself

Tips for cutting down

Here are some things to consider if you want to reduce your alcohol or drug use.

- Set yourself goals.
- Reduce your intake gradually. It can be dangerous to stop suddenly. You can get help and advice if you need to.
- Set a budget so you know how much you're spending.
- Let people know – tell people you trust and explain why you're cutting down so they can support you.
- Keep track of how much you're using by writing it down.
- Keep a diary to help you work out the things that make you want to take a drug or have a drink.
- If you're tempted, remind yourself of the negative consequences and why you want to change.
- Reward your progress – for example, you could spend the money you save on something for yourself.

You can get worksheets and other useful resources to help you manage your drinking or drug use from some of the organisations listed in **chapter 6**.

Maintaining recovery

You may have setbacks. Try not to be hard on yourself if this happens. If you can, build a support network of people who understand. It's okay to ask for help – for example, if you're struggling with withdrawal symptoms.

Try to work out what makes you want to go back to drinking or taking a drug. You might want to stay away from the people or situations that make you want to start using again.

Talking to other people in a similar situation can be very helpful. See **chapter 6** for details of organisations that can put you in touch with support groups in your area. These may be face to face or online.

You might also find it helpful to attend meetings such as those run by UK Smart Recovery or Alcoholics Anonymous – see **chapter 6**.

“ You need determination and resilience to deal with giving up.

4. Ways to help yourself



When my uncle retired, he became really isolated and his community moved on. He's lost contact with work friends, others have moved away to be near family, or they've died. I think in the pub he gets to talk to people.

“ Boredom is a killer
and drinking fills time.
Do voluntary work.
Get involved.

Stay connected

Try to find ways to keep busy that don't involve alcohol or drugs. Your friends and family may be able to help you with this. Go back to a hobby or take up a new one that helps to distract you, like art or music.

Spending time in nature can really help your health and wellbeing. Contact your local Mind to ask about outdoor activities such as gardening, conservation or arts and crafts (**0300 123 3393**, [mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health)).

You could also ask your GP if there are activities in your area they can refer you to.



Our guide **If you're feeling lonely** has more ideas for staying connected.



5. If you're worried about someone

If you're concerned that someone you know might be misusing drugs or alcohol, try speaking to them and encourage them to get help.

Be patient – it can take time for someone to admit they have a problem. Reassure them that they won't be judged.

Help them to find the right support. You could go with them to appointments if they would like you to.

Many people are able to recover from drug or alcohol problems, but it can take a long time and the person you're helping may go through different stages – from thinking about change, taking action, to relapse and having to start again. If they have setbacks, encourage them to return to their recovery plan.



5. If you're worried about someone



“ Help them to find other things to enjoy and live for beyond drink and drugs.

Look after yourself

Living with someone who is misusing drugs or alcohol can be extremely stressful and helping them to stop can be a difficult and frustrating experience. You may feel worried and alone. Make sure you get support for yourself as well.

It can be helpful to talk to other people who have been in a similar situation. Carers UK (**0808 808 7777, [carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org)**) or Carers Trust (**0300 772 9600, [carers.org](https://www.carers.org)**) can put you in touch with local carer's groups.



See our guide **Caring for someone** for more information about the support available for carers.

Some organisations have support groups or helplines specifically for families and carers affected by someone's drinking or drug use. They include Al-Anon family groups (**0800 0086 811, [al-anonuk.org.uk](https://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)**) and DrugFAM (**0300 888 3853, [drugfam.co.uk](https://www.drugfam.co.uk)**). In Scotland, you could contact Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs (**08080 10 10 11, [sfad.org.uk](https://www.sfad.org.uk)**).

Your GP may have details of other organisations that could help. See **chapter 6** for more useful contacts.

5. If you're worried about someone

If you're worried about someone's safety

Older people who misuse alcohol or drugs can be at increased risk of self-neglect, abuse or injury. You may be worried that someone you know can't look after themselves or that people they associate with are taking advantage of them.

If you're concerned about someone's wellbeing, contact the adult social services department at their local council. Many councils have a dedicated safeguarding team to help adults who are at risk.



See our guide **Staying in control** for more information.

6. Useful contacts

There are many organisations that may be able to help you. They offer information and advice, useful resources, support groups or online forums.

You may need to try more than one before you find support that's right for you. Some of these organisations charge for their services and they may not all operate in your local area.

Alcohol Change UK

Alcohol charity offering information and advice.

- **020 3907 8480**
- **alcoholchange.org.uk**

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Free national helpline and network of local groups for anyone affected by alcohol.

- **0800 917 7650**
- **alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk**

Drinkaware

National alcohol education charity.

- **020 7766 9900**
- **drinkaware.co.uk**

6. Useful contacts

Drinkline

Free confidential helpline for people worried about their drinking.

- **0300 123 1110**

FRANK

National drugs service offering information and advice.

- **0300 123 6600**
- **talktofrank.com**

LGBT Foundation

Information, support and advice for LGBTQ+ people who are concerned about their drug or alcohol use.

- **0345 3 30 30 30**
- **lgbt.foundation/recovery**

Mind

Information and advice for people affected by mental illness.

- **0300 123 3393**
- **mind.org.uk**

Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

Help for anyone who has problems with drugs.

- **0300 999 1212**
- **ukna.org**

Rehab 4 Addiction

Advice and treatment programmes.

- **0800 140 4690**
- **rehab4addiction.co.uk**

Rehab 4 Alcoholism

Rehabilitation advice for alcohol and other drugs.

- **0800 111 4108**
- **rehab4alcoholism.com**

Rethink Mental Illness

Information and advice for people affected by mental illness.

- **0808 801 0525**
- **rethink.org**

6. Useful contacts

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Information leaflets about drugs and alcohol.

- **020 8618 4000**
- **rcpsych.ac.uk**

Samaritans

Confidential support if you need someone to talk to.

- **116 123**
- **samaritans.org**

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

Support in Scotland if you're concerned about someone's drug or alcohol use.

- **08080 10 10 11**
- **sfad.org.uk**

Turning Point

Health and wellbeing services, including drug and alcohol support.

- **020 7481 7600**
- **turning-point.co.uk**

UK Smart Recovery

Self-management and recovery training.

- **0330 053 6022**
- **smartrecovery.org.uk**

We Are With You

Online support and local services if you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking or drug use.

- **wearewithyou.org.uk**





Harry's story

"I started drinking small bottles of beer when I was 13. Drink was exciting then and I got a taste for it. I came from a background where there was drink in the house and I think my dad might have been doing the same as me – he could drink when he wanted and then leave it alone at other times.

"I drank more and more, and down the line I saw that I had a problem. I realised that drinking is a mistake. It's an easy escape from how you're feeling. It stops you having to face up to life. I didn't know how else to enjoy myself and, if someone upset me, I would use it as an excuse to drink more.

"Looking back, I probably hadn't learnt to deal with difficult feelings without the help of alcohol. As a person I've always seemed happy-go-lucky to a certain extent but I wasn't that happy. I was putting on a front.

“I arrived at a point where I couldn’t remember myself sober. I was an alcoholic, spending money I couldn’t afford. I swapped alcohol for cannabis. I told myself it was a soft drug and would be okay but I soon realised someone like me could be addicted to anything. I’d be in a really bad mood if I couldn’t get hold of any.

“I decided I needed to change. Counselling, AA and Narcotics Anonymous meetings really helped me. So did SMART meetings – it stands for Self-Management and Recovery Training and uses cognitive behavioural therapy and motivational techniques. I went for help several times a week. I wanted to get myself clean.

“I’m still careful to keep away from temptation as the devil is always on your shoulder. I keep going to AA once a week. There’s true fellowship there. We can help each other.

“My family all know I don’t drink and they would never offer me alcohol. They’re all proud of me for what I’ve achieved and that is tremendously satisfying.”

“ I realised that drinking is a mistake. It’s an easy escape from how you’re feeling.

About Independent Age

At Independent Age, we want more people in the UK to live a happy, connected and purposeful later life. That's why we support people aged over 65 to get involved in things they enjoy. We also campaign and give advice on the issues that matter most: health and care, money and housing.

For information or advice – we can arrange a free, impartial chat with an adviser – call us on freephone **0800 319 6789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 6.30pm) or email us at **advice@independentage.org**.

You can also support this work by volunteering with us, joining our campaigns to improve life for older people experiencing hardship, donating to us or remembering us in your will.

For more information, visit **[independentage.org](https://www.independentage.org)** or call us on **0800 319 6789**.



**Independent
Age**



Independent Age
18 Avonmore Road
London
W14 8RR

020 7605 4200
charity@independentage.org
[independentage.org](https://www.independentage.org)
Helpline 0800 319 6789



Like our page **Independent Age**



Follow us **independentage**



Follow us **@independentage**



Subscribe to **IndependentAge**

© Independent Age 2022

Independent Age is the operating name of the Royal United Kingdom Beneficent Association
Registered charity number 210729 (England and Wales) SC047184 (Scotland)