

Reducing your drinking

Using self-help tools

The strategies/tools suggested throughout your sessions are evidence based methods of managing your wellbeing and reducing substance use. We are all individuals, and may respond to situations in different ways, therefore not every tool will work for everyone. There are absolutely no set rules for helping to achieve behaviour change that can be used on everyone. A helpful way of thinking about this could be to ask yourself “is my current method working for me?” If the answer is yes, then great, but if not, then there may be an alternative strategy that is more productive for you.

As with any skill, self-help can take time, practice, and often dedication to succeed in the future. Just like riding a bike, you won't be able to ride it the first time you sit on one, and will probably have some falls along the journey! But with time, practice and exploration it is possible for everybody to improve their physical health, which will undoubtedly have a great impact on their emotional health and wellbeing.

Introduction

Most people drink alcohol on occasion and for most, drinking does not usually result in any harm. However, drinking too much or at the wrong time can cause problems, both for your physical and mental health, as well as within your relationships and negatively affect the responsibilities you have.

While alcohol can have a temporary positive impact on our mood, in the long term it can cause problems for our mental health and wellbeing. Alcohol has been found to alter your brain chemistry due to the fact that alcohol is a depressant drug. The relaxed feeling that you experience when you have had a drink is due to the chemical changes alcohol causes in your brain.

The more you drink, the more you are affected by alcohol. However, when high levels of alcohol are involved, there is a strong likelihood that instead of feeling the pleasurable effects, a negative emotional response will take over. It is for this reason that alcohol is linked very strongly to aggression, anger, anxiety and depression.

While a glass of wine at the end of a long day can help you to relax, in the long term, it can raise levels of low mood and anxiety, and it can also make stress harder to manage. This is because regular and/or heavy drinking has been found to interfere with the way that our brain transmits information, which is needed for good mental health.

When we drink, we are also less likely to interpret a situation accurately due to the fact that alcohol will numb our senses. For example, if we have been drinking, we may be more likely to misinterpret a situation as being negative and blow it out of proportion.

A lack of quality sleep is also linked to drinking alcohol, as alcohol prevents you from maintaining 'deep sleep' – which is vital for our recovery. Please see the Sleep booklet in this series for more information.

Also if you are pregnant, it is important to remember that alcohol can harm the foetus.

How does alcohol affect the body and mind?

Alcohol is a very toxic substance to the human body, however if it is used moderately, in a healthy person, the liver is usually able to break down and process the alcohol effectively.

Short term effects: when you drink alcohol, you usually feel much more relaxed and sociable. However, there is usually a fine line between feeling merry and relaxed and experiencing the negative effects. Large amounts of alcohol tend to reduce inhibitions, therefore making people more likely to do or say things that they normally wouldn't. Alcohol in large doses also makes people feel emotional or aggressive. Alcohol can also cause 'blackouts' in memory. This is where you cannot remember what happened for a period of time whilst you were drinking.

Long term effects: If you drink heavily for a long period of time, it can have serious physical effects on your body. Alcohol is very high in calories, so you may be putting on weight (specifically around the stomach area) without realising why. It can also cause heart conditions, cancer, and type 2 diabetes. If you drink over a long period, you may find it difficult to form new memories, so that you cannot remember recent events; you may not be able to think clearly; you may have difficulty with problem solving and concentrating. The effects of this tend to recover if you stop drinking.

Dependency and withdrawal: Drinking large amounts over a long period of time can cause you to become dependent on alcohol. Alcohol is a physically addictive substance. Alcohol withdrawal causes extreme sweating, anxiety, trembling and sometimes delirium (which may include confusion, disorientation and hallucinations). **If you have an addiction to alcohol it is very dangerous to stop drinking suddenly. If you would like to quit, it is always important to seek professional help before you cut down and/or stop.**

Alcohol and our mental health

Alcohol is also very closely linked to your mental health and wellbeing. In Britain, people who experience anxiety or depression are twice as likely to be heavy or problem drinkers. For some people, the depression or anxiety did come first, and they have usually tried to 'self-medicate' through drinking as it is found to temporarily reduce feelings of anxiety and elevate our mood.

Put simply, a major reason for drinking alcohol is to change our mood – or change our mental state. Alcohol can temporarily alleviate feelings of anxiety and depression; it can also help to temporarily relieve the symptoms of more serious health problems.

For some, drinking alcohol can help people to feel less anxious and more confident in the short term, but this is because it slows down the part of the brain that is associated with feeling inhibition.

Alcohol has also been found to be linked to suicide, self-harm and psychosis. This is because alcohol can make people lose their inhibitions and therefore behave more impulsively. This can lead to people doing things that they most likely would not have done if they were sober. For example, according to the NHS in Scotland, more than half the people who received treatment for self-harm said they had been drinking before or whilst self-harming.

Alcohol problems are more common among people with more severe mental health problems. This does not necessarily mean that alcohol causes severe mental illness. 'Self-medicating' to deal with difficult feelings or symptoms of mental illness is often why people with mental health or emotional problems drink. But it can make existing mental health or emotional problems worse.

Evidence shows that people who consume high amounts of alcohol are vulnerable to higher levels of mental ill health and it can be a contributory factor in some mental illnesses, such as depression.

When we have alcohol in our blood, our mood changes, and our behaviour then also changes. This change depends on how much we drink and how quickly we drink it. Alcohol depresses the central nervous system, and this can make us less inhibited in our behaviour. It can also help 'numb' our emotions, so we can avoid difficult issues in our lives.

Alcohol can also reveal or magnify our underlying feelings. This is one of the reasons that many people become angry or aggressive when drinking. If our underlying feelings are of anxiety, anger or unhappiness, then alcohol can magnify them.

One of the main problems associated with using alcohol to deal with anxiety and depression is that people may feel much worse when the effects have worn off. This can lead some people to drink more, to ward off these difficult feelings, and a dangerous cycle of dependence can develop.

How much should I be drinking?

Drinking within the government's low risk alcohol guidelines will help to reduce some of the harmful effects of alcohol.

The UK Government recommends that a maximum of 14 units of alcohol a week is drunk per adult. In the past, the recommended guidelines for men and women were different, but these have now changed to be the same for all genders. Drinking more, more regularly means that your tolerance to alcohol will also grow, which is not a good thing.

14 units a week is equal to:

Alcohol	Equivalent to?	Calories
6 pints of low strength beer	6 slices of pizza	1,092 calories
6 medium glasses of wine	6 ice creams with cones	954 calories
6 pints of cider	6 doughnuts	1,250 calories
14 single shots	6 bags of chocolate buttons	854 calories (this will increase with choice of mixer)
12 bottles of alcopops	12 small hot chocolates with cream	2,040 calories

My current drinking

In a week, I would normally drink:

Beer 5% (330ml bottle)	
Beer 4% (pint)	
Small glass of wine	
Large glass of wine	

Single spirit measure	
Medium glass of wine (175ml)	
Bottle of 40% spirit (70cl)	
Cider (4.5%) (can)	
Cider (7.5%) (pint)	

I am hoping to:

- Cut down my use to _____ units a week/month
- Quit use altogether

My motivation

(What are your motivations to change your behaviour? How will this improve your physical health? How will it improve your mental health? What about your relationships? Perhaps it will improve your ability to do certain tasks and improve things like concentration?)

My Barriers

(What are your perceived barriers to achieving your goal successfully? What things do you think may hold you back? What things have previously held you back when trying to achieve this goal?)

My plan of action

(How do you think that you will overcome these issues? What plans do you have in place?)

Self-help tips for reducing your alcohol consumption

If you feel that you are addicted to alcohol use, or if you are consuming more than 40 units of alcohol a week, it is always best to seek professional help from your GP or from a specialist alcohol reduction service.

If however, you are drinking under this amount and are looking for tips on reducing or cutting down your use, the following information might be useful.

If you are drinking on a regular basis, the amount of alcohol you need to drink to get the same buzz usually goes up. Therefore, you need to drink more to get the same effects that you once did. Your tolerance can also go up without you even noticing, so it might be worthwhile to check your recycling bin or supermarket receipts to see if you are consuming more than you used to.

If you think your tolerance is rising, it might be worth thinking about whether you are becoming **dependent** on alcohol. Everybody that is drinking reasonably heavily on a regular basis will have a dependence. For example, you might feel like you can't relax or unwind without a drink, or you can't go out and have a good time without drinking. It might even be if you have a few drinks and then realise you can't stop drinking. We probably all know people like this, but these are all signs of alcohol dependence.

The good news is that we can do a lot to reduce our alcohol consumption and reduce our tolerance to alcohol.

If you are cutting down and are living with your partner, the best way that you can cut down is together. Quite often, we adopt our partners habits, so splitting a bottle of wine after a long day might be something you both do without paying much attention to.

1) Do something different

If you drink alcohol at specified times within your day/week, plan an activity at that time that won't involve alcohol. For example, you could go to a class, or have a hot drink, or head out for a walk.

2) Avoid temptation

If you have scheduled in an alcohol free day, it might mean avoiding places where you would normally have a drink for a while. If you tend to drink when you eat out, you might want to instead go to restaurants that don't serve alcohol. Try to identify the times you would normally drink and do something else on those days, such as volunteering or even going to the gym! If you are meeting friends, you could suggest an activity that does not involve alcohol, like going to the cinema

3) Treat yourself (and each other if relevant!)

Instead of drinking every time you are together, save the alcohol for a special dinner. When you do drink, don't feel like you have to finish the bottle, and treat yourself with something once you have achieved your goal (e.g. sticking to 14 units a week).

4) Make a plan

Before you start drinking, make a plan of how many drinks you are going to have. If necessary, withdraw the money from your account that will cover the cost of these drinks only, and don't take any extra out with you.

5) Let your friends and family members know

If you let your friends and family members know that you are cutting down and that it is important to you, they may support you in making this behaviour change

6) Take it a day at a time

Try to cut back a little every day; that way, every day you do is a success

7) Make it a small

A useful tip is to ask for smaller measures than the ones you currently have. For example, you can drink bottled beer instead of pints, or a small glass of wine with soda instead of a large.

8) Have a lower strength drink

Cut down the alcohol you are consuming by swapping strong beers or wines with lower strength versions

9) Have a glass of water before and after every drink

This will help you to stay hydrated and help you to reduce your alcohol consumption

10) Take a break

Have several drink-free days every week and plan these on the Sunday evening before the week starts.

11) Make an effort to notice how you feel

As alcohol is a depressant, it will have a negative effect on your mood. Its overall effect is to suppress the hormones that make you feel happy. Track your mood over a period of a month to notice how you feel on days you don't drink in comparison to days that you do drink. It might also be helpful to track things like your weight.

If you are having a dinner party:

You may find that you tend to drink at dinner parties way more than you normally would. This is because you are among friends in a safe environment and your glass may seem to stay magically full. However, there are things that you can do to avoid this if you are hosting.

1) Make sure the water glasses stay full

Give your guests something else to sip on apart from an alcoholic drink. Drinking water alongside alcohol can also help you to stay hydrated and lessen your hangover

2) Don't continually top up wine glasses

If you let guests pour their own wine, this will hopefully reduce the amount they drink overall.

3) Have small wine glasses

There are generally 3 sizes of wine glass, small (125ml); medium (175ml), and large (250ml). An average 125ml glass of wine would be around 1.5 units, but a large glass can be over 3 units.

4) Serve alcohol that is lower in percentage

The units and calories in wine ranges; with the percentage of alcohol from 8 to 15%. However low alcohol and no alcohol wines are readily available. Have a look next time you are in your supermarket.

5) Make spritzers

Have soda water or lemonade on hand to make spritzers. If you use half a glass of small wine, there will be less than a unit in each glass.

Potential alcohol withdrawal symptoms

As mentioned above, going 'cold turkey' or suddenly drinking no alcohol at all can cause serious alcohol withdrawal symptoms if you were drinking heavily before, so it is always recommended to seek professional support to reduce or quit if this is you.

When reducing your use, psychological symptoms are very common no matter how much you used to drink. Psychological symptoms can include irritability, poor concentration, feeling shaky, feeling tired or having issues with your sleep.

Physical symptoms of stopping drinking may include feeling sick, shaking or trembling, having palpitations and having a lack of appetite. **If you experience physical withdrawal symptoms of any kind, you must see your GP as soon as possible.** Your doctor may be able to prescribe you medication to manage your symptoms and can also offer you counselling or support to help you to stay on track.

Benefits of cutting down your drinking

- **You will have more energy:** Alcohol does affect our mood, our health and our immunity. Drinking too much can make you feel tired and sluggish the day after.
- **You will sleep better:** Alcohol is known to affect the quality of your sleep. When you drink too much, you actually spend less time sleeping in the stage that restores our health. You are also more likely to wake up early and find it difficult to fall asleep again.
- **You will lose weight:** Alcohol is high in calories. Having just 1 pint a day for a week is equal to 1,500 calories, which can quickly add pounds to your waistline!
- **Your risk of developing alcohol-related cancer, alcohol-related heart disease and diabetes will lower:** Cutting down on alcohol will reduce your risk of developing cancer, liver or heart disease and could also lower your blood pressure.
- **Your skin will improve:** Alcohol dehydrates us, and with that, ages our skin. Skin is very quick to react to changes so you could be looking better sooner than you think.
- **You will have more money!** Keep a note of the money you have saved and treat yourself to something once you have saved enough.
- **Your concentration levels will improve:** No more fuzzy head from the morning after!

Supporting your mental health

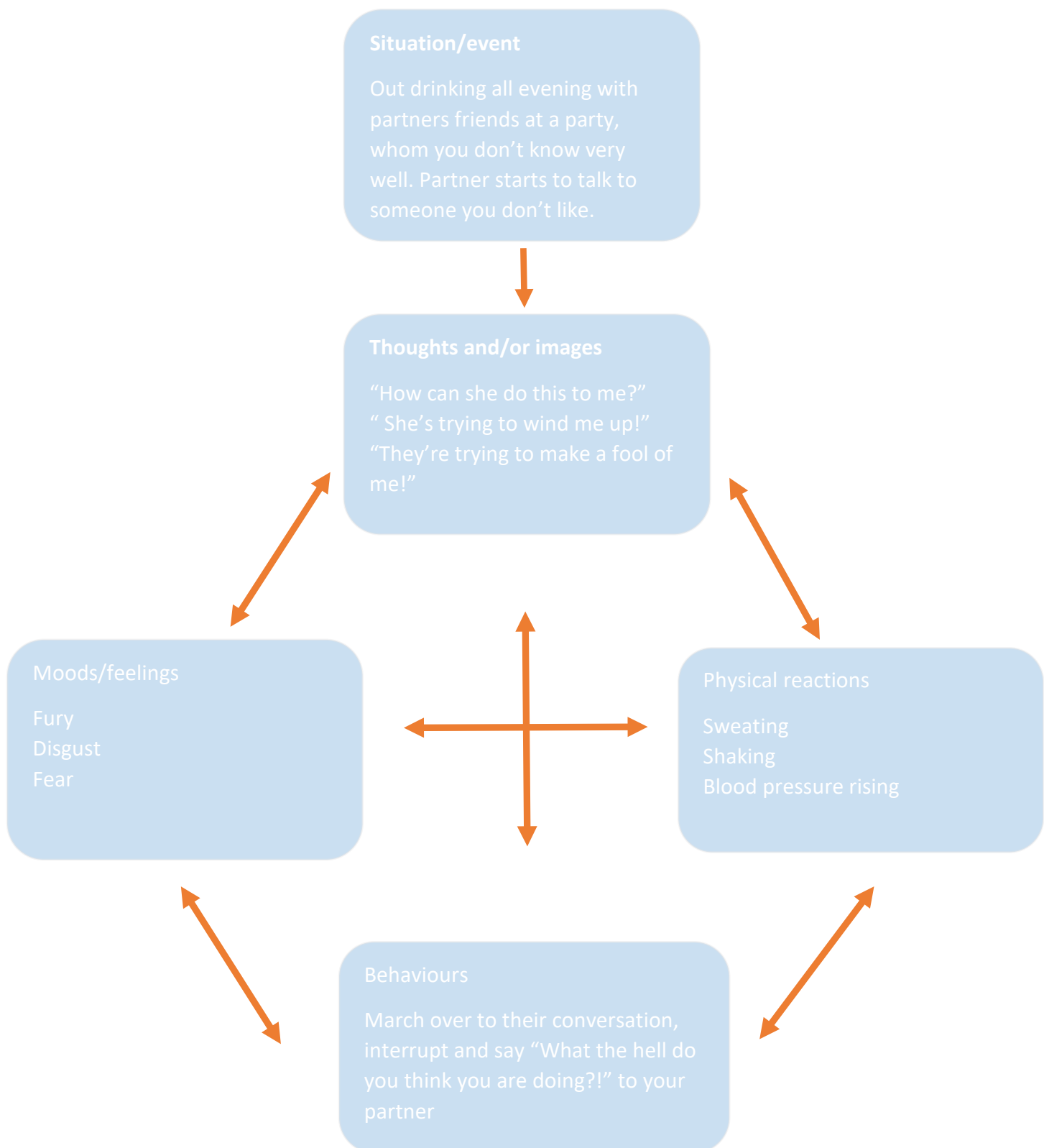
People often misuse alcohol to try and improve their emotional health. However, even though alcohol might appear to help in the short-term, drinking can actually make you feel much worse in the long term. There are other methods that can be used to improve emotional health that work just as well in the short and long term that are much better for our health and wellbeing. These methods can often be challenging to use at the beginning, but this is because learning anything new takes practice. Just as achieving physical fitness takes time, practice and commitment, so too does achieving mental fitness.

There are 3 basic principles in obtaining emotional health:

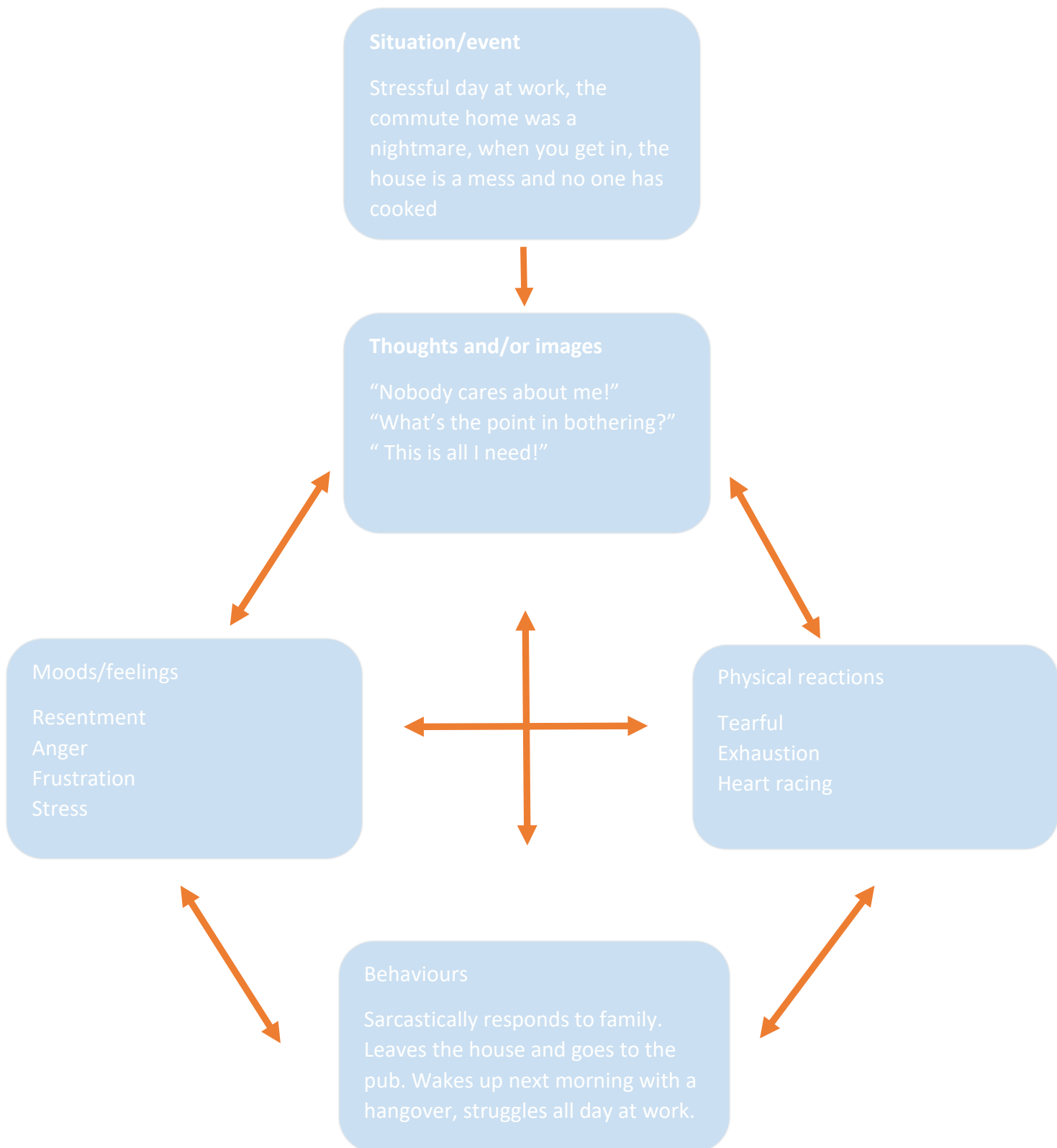
- Maximise the things that make you feel good and minimise (as far is practical) the things that make you feel bad
- Value yourself
- Recognise that you can change

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) 5 areas model

The CBT 5 areas model is a useful diagram to explain how a situation or event can impact on our emotional health and wellbeing.



CBT 5 Areas – An alternative example



Both of the above examples show how alcohol can help in the short term, but can really impact in the long term.

In the first example, the person was drinking to help them to feel more comfortable in a social situation, where they were surrounded by people that they did not know particularly well, or like. The alcohol in the short term may have helped to reduce their feelings of anxiety, however, as the evening progressed, it resulted in the person reading the situation wrong, and for them behaving in a way that was out of character.

In the second example, the person decided to drink alcohol to reduce their feelings of stress, frustration and resentment. Although in the short term it did help, in the long term, it meant that they struggled at work more the next day because of their hangover. If this were to continue it may lead to a breakdown in communication with their loved ones at home, as well as issues within the workplace.

In both situations, drinking to try to help your emotional health or

Dissecting the problem

This exercise is to help gather information about the nature of your drinking.

What is the main issue?

How does this affect your life? What does it stop you from doing or being?

Reducing those unwanted physical reactions

When trying to break out of a bad habit, it can sometimes feel overwhelming to not give in to temptation. We can often be left feeling even more anxious, stressed and worked up about situations that we normally would have been able to manage. Evidence suggests that when making a behaviour change, the first two weeks tend to be the most challenging. If you are able to keep strong for those two weeks, it is much more likely that you will be successful in your attempt in the long run.

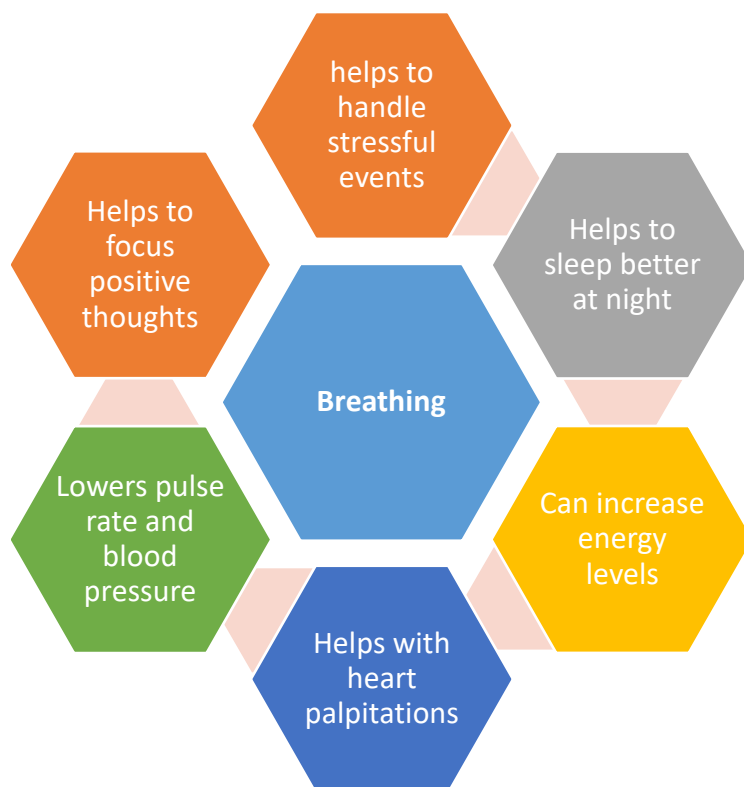
There are many techniques that can help you to reduce the unhelpful physical sensations that you may experience. In order for these to be effective, it is important to practice them regularly, at times when you do not feel stressed, anxious or low in mood. This is so when we do need the exercise, we will be practised in using it, and it won't be adding any more stress to an already stressful situation!



As we have a limited capacity for the things that we are able to manage at any one time, it is really important to become more self-aware of what is currently in your stress jug. By developing awareness, we can learn to better manage our stress levels, and also implement stress-busting exercises before our stress levels overflow.

Breathing

Breathing is something that all humans do instinctively to stay alive. Automatic breathing is when we breathe without paying attention to the breath. Evidence suggests that if we deliberately pay attention to our breath, it can have a lasting positive impact on the way we feel. By having a calmer frame of mind, we are in a better position to think clearer, and make better decisions regarding our physical health.

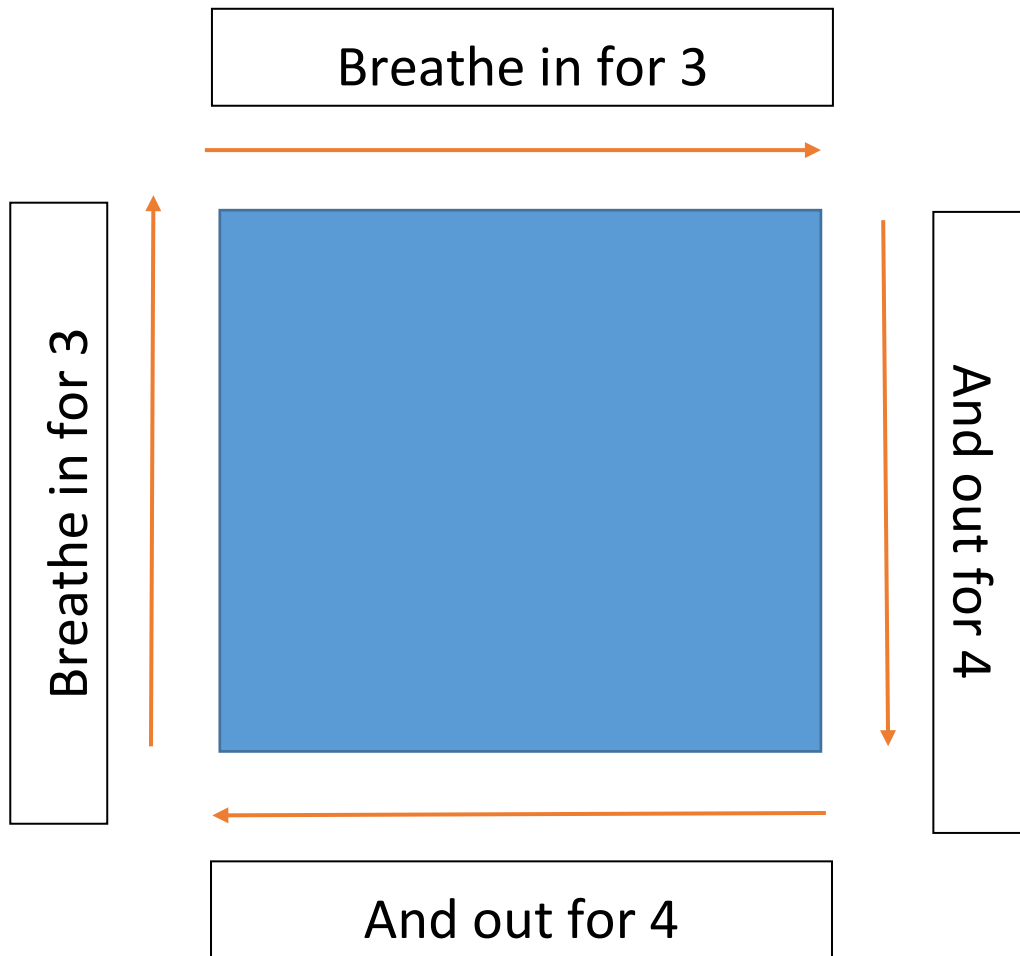


When changing any behaviour, it can often feel as if we are battling without thoughts and emotions constantly. Breathing exercises can act as an anchor, to bring you back to the present moment and ground your current thoughts. By conducting a relaxation technique, it can help you to calm your physical sensations down to understand that you do have control of those, at least. Breathing exercises can also help with the side-effects of stopping or cutting down from alcohol use such as insomnia.

In order to breathe correctly, it is important that breathing is conducted from the belly, rather than at the top of your chest. When you breathe in, you should see your stomach slightly protrude out. When you breathe out, your stomach should go back to its resting position. If you start to feel dizzy, stop, and practice again when you feel ok.

**Breathe in for a count of 3.....2.....1.....
and out for 4.....3.....2.....1.....and repeat....**

Sometimes it can help to focus on a square object to help you to conduct this exercise effectively.



Visualisation

Visualisation is a really helpful tool that can be used to help you to temporarily remove yourself from a situation that is causing you distress.

Anyone can learn to use visualisation techniques, although using them effectively takes time and practice.

There are also many guided visualisation exercises available for free on the internet. Try a search on YouTube for 'guided visualisation' and see what takes your fancy. If you do not have access to the internet, you are able to borrow visualisation tapes from your local library. Pop in and ask to see what they have on offer.

Here is a quick exercise that you can practice at home for yourself.

Sit comfortably in a chair, and take three deep breaths in and out, counting to three for every breath in, and 4 for every breath out.

If it helps, close your eyes, and continue to focus on your breath, breathing in for 3, and out for 4.

I want you to imagine walking down a set of steps. There are three steps in total. For each step, you will breathe in for three, and out for 4.

At the bottom of the steps there is a door. When you open the door, you are in another place. This is somewhere that you feel relaxed and happy.

Where are you?

What can you see?

What can you hear?

What can you smell?

What can you touch?

What can you taste if anything?

Spend five minutes in this place, really engaging with all of your senses. Pay close attention to how everything makes you feel, creating a sense of wellbeing and relaxation.

When you are ready, feel free to walk back to the door, walk up the stairs, and return to the present moment.

Mindfulness

A technique that has been proven to be effective in changing behaviours is mindfulness. Mindfulness has become recognised as an effective way to increase fulfilment, reduce stress, raise self-awareness, enhance emotional intelligence, and change unhelpful emotion, thought and behaviour patterns.

The roots of mindfulness lie in Eastern philosophies including Buddhism, Taoism and Yoga, although the practice of mindfulness has now been adapted for the Western world.

Mindfulness works so well because everyone has the capability of becoming mindful at any time. We have all experienced what it means to be mindful. Have you ever been concentrating on something for a long period, such as writing a piece of work, doing the gardening, or even reading a book, and then have suddenly realised that time has flown by? That is being mindful. Mindfulness is simply the practice of paying attention to the present moment, and all that it entails. It is not thinking about the past, or focussing on the future. It is simply the practice of using all 5 of your senses to notice what is currently going on at the moment, in a non-judgemental fashion.

The opposite of mindfulness is to not focus on the present moment. For example, if you are thinking about what happened last night, or what you are going to wear tomorrow, or even travelling from A to B without actually remembering any of the route.

Mindfulness training has emerged as a powerful, evidence-based tool for enhancing psychological health. Evidence suggests that mindfulness enhances psychological and emotional resilience, and increases life satisfaction.

Becoming more aware of the present moment allows us to enjoy the world around us and understand ourselves better. When we become more aware of the present moment, we begin to experience afresh the everyday things that we can take for granted, or that we lose, because we're so focussed on the past or future.

Mindfulness also helps us to become more aware of the continuous stream of thoughts that we have, and how these impact on our feelings. It can help us to see how we become entangled within these unhelpful thought processes and help us to create some distance from our thoughts and our self.

Recognising that you are not your thoughts, but that your thoughts are something that you merely *experience* is one of the most important lessons that mindfulness teaches you. Once you learn this, you gradually are able to train yourself to notice when unhelpful thoughts are taking over.

If you are interested in finding out more about mindfulness, please ask for a copy of the mindfulness booklet by emailing or calling the Physical Health Service, or, you can download it from our website on <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/care-and-treatment/treatments/physical-health/>

Cognitive restructuring

Cognitive restructuring is where we identify our unhelpful thoughts, something that all of us can get in a habit of doing over the years, and trying to challenge them through more thorough investigation. If we are able to understand how our thoughts can affect our feelings, physical reactions and behaviours then we can try to reduce the impact that they have on our lives.

Sometimes, it is not an event in itself that makes us feel low, anxious, stressed or angry. Rather, it is our *beliefs* about the particular situation that might determine our emotional reaction. For example, someone may have already decided that they are not going to enjoy the party before they have even gone!

We also unfortunately, have a tendency to tell ourselves that if we think a specific thought, it must be true, because we often feel all of the physical reactions associated with it. This is especially true when we are distressed in any way, as someone can feel when they are trying to cut down or stop drinking. We are more likely to focus on the negative things in the past, or ruminate on what may happen in the future. We also become really good at ignoring any of the positive signs, instead focussing on being more self-critical.

And then we wonder why we feel so emotional!

Changing your thinking about a situation can have a huge impact on how we feel, which then has a knock-on effect on what we do.

An introduction to the ABCs

As seen in the 5 areas model, our thoughts are connected to our emotions, physical reactions and behaviours. A useful tool we can help to challenge our unhelpful thoughts is through the ABC exercises.

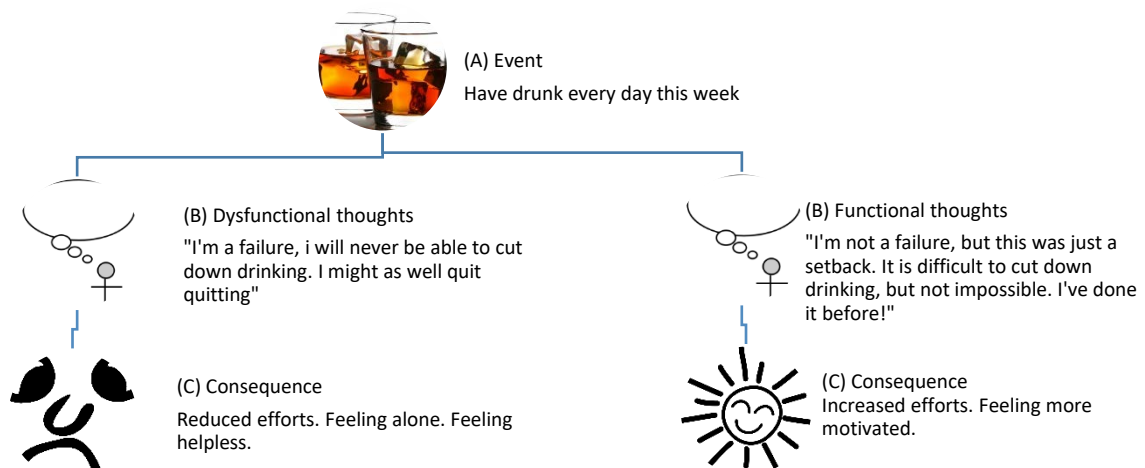
It can be quite self-defeating to have certain thoughts that prevent us from making progress. Thoughts can often be based on faulty assumptions that we have made about the situation. For example, "He's made me angry". The actual truth is, no one can *make* anyone angry. A more accurate description of this would be that you feel angry about his behaviour. In fact, they are not making you anything, but they are simply behaving in a way that you are getting angry about. This means that the responsibility for the anger is now no longer theirs, but is yours. And because it is yours, you now have the power to do something about it.

Simply put, it is the idea of that we think about what they do. For example, if you really believe that they **MUST NOT** do whatever they are doing, and then they still continue to do it, then the **DEMAND** inside your head will be "they **MUST NOT** do that". This will put you under considerable pressure from yourself to do something about it, often when you are very unable to actually do anything about it.

By changing the **MUST NOT** to a preference, "I'd prefer if they didn't do that". The heat is turned down, and you can function again. After all, it is now only a preference!

We can use this same process to help us to overcome issues with drinking. For example, a self-defeating thought might be "I won't have fun unless I drink". The truth is we don't know if we will or will not until you've done it, and actually having fun is not dependent on the alcohol, but is actually dependent on us, as we have the power to do something about it. Therefore, by changing the unhelpful statement from "I won't have fun unless I drink" to a more helpful statement "I usually have fun when I go out with my friends", the pressure is completely removed from drinking and is focussing on something that we can influence, which will have a huge impact on how we view the situation.

The ABC exercise is a simple exercise to help you to make this adjustment.



Identifying unhelpful thoughts

Before identifying thoughts, it might be useful to consider what the difference is between a thought and a feeling. Thoughts can often be put into a sentence. For example, “I will never get better”. They also tend to sound like ongoing commentary inside a person’s head. Feelings are emotional states, e.g. happiness, sadness, anger, despondency. They can usually be described in one word. Thoughts can influence feelings, and feelings can influence thoughts. However, separating your thoughts from your feelings is key, as quite often, we cannot directly change our feelings. However, we can directly change our thoughts, which has an indirect impact on our feelings.

Do you recognise making any of these?

<p>Mental filter – we only notice what the filter allows us to notice, and we ‘filter out’ anything that doesn’t fit. It’s a bit like looking through dark glasses, it dulls our view of the colourful world!</p> <p>Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? What would be more realistic?</p>	<p>Judgements – making evaluations or judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, instead of describing what we actually see and have evidence for.</p> <p>Although I’m making an evaluation or judgement about this world, and although this is how I perceive it, my judgements are not always right or helpful. Is there another way I could see this?</p>
<p>Prediction – Fortune telling or believing we know what is going to happen in the future.</p> <p>Am I thinking I can predict the future? How likely is that to happen? Can I do anything to make this prediction less likely?</p>	<p>Emotional reasoning – I feel so bad, therefore it must be bad! I feel anxious, therefore I must be in danger.</p> <p>Just because it feels bad, doesn’t necessarily mean it is bad. My feelings are a reaction to my thoughts and if my thoughts are unhelpful, it is no wonder I am feeling bad!</p>
<p>Mind reading – assuming we know what others are thinking (usually about us)</p> <p>Am I assuming that I know what others are thinking? What’s the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there a more balanced way of looking at this?</p>	<p>Mountains and molehills – exaggerating the risk of danger or the negatives, and minimising the odds of how things are most likely to turn out, or minimising positives.</p> <p>Am I exaggerating the bad stuff? How would someone else see it? What’s the bigger picture?</p>
<p>Compare and despair – seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, getting upset when comparing ourselves negatively against them.</p> <p>What would be a more helpful way of thinking about this?</p>	<p>Catastrophising – imagining and believing the worst possible thing will happen</p> <p>This isn’t helpful right now. What’s more likely to happen?</p>
<p>Critical self – Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our responsibility</p> <p>The internal bully is at it again! Would most people who know me really say that about me? Is this something I am totally responsible for?</p>	<p>Black and white thinking – believing that something or someone can only be good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in between or ‘shades of grey’. Things aren’t totally white or totally black – there are always shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?</p>
<p>Shoulds and musts – thinking or saying ‘I should’ (or shouldn’t) and ‘I must’ and ‘I ought’ puts unnecessary pressure on ourselves and sets up unrealistic expectations.</p> <p>Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations that are almost impossible and that I wouldn’t expect of others? What would be more realistic?</p>	<p>Memories – upsetting memories can be triggered by current situations, leading us to act like the danger is here and now, rather in the past. This can cause immediate distress and change your present behaviour.</p> <p>This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it is not actually happening right now.</p>

Getting hooked

When we get so caught up with what we're thinking, we can often get "hooked by our mind" or "hooked by thoughts". This means that our thoughts impact our behaviour in a strong way. In what situations does your mind manage to hook you regarding alcohol? What sort of things does it say in order to hook you? How do you manage to unhook yourself?

Date/Time Triggering Events or Situation	What did your mind say or do to hook you?	How did your behaviour change when you got hooked? What did those actions cost you?	Did you manage to unhook yourself? If so, how?
<i>Tuesday, 8pm</i>	<i>Work was a nightmare today, I could really do with a glass of red</i>	<i>Started feeling agitated, felt the 'urge' to drink, became fidgety</i>	<i>Yes, by going for a walk</i>

Activity diary

Another useful way to see if you are getting what you want out of a day is to keep an activity diary. One way that you can do this is by filling the diary out as it is for a week, and raking each thing that you did out of 10 (1 being the least, 10 being the most) in terms of how much pleasure each activity gives you and how important each activity is to conduct. E.g. doing the washing up might be a 3 for pleasure but a 9 for importance. However, reading a novel might give you 9 for pleasure and 2 for importance. It is important to make sure that you get a mix of activities that provide you with both to stay emotionally well.

Activity Diary

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Relaxation

Relaxation exercises can help you to recompose your thoughts and gather yourself together to help reduce any unhelpful physical feelings you might be experiencing, such as anxiety.

Breathing

One way we can do this is by conducting a breathing exercise.

It is also very simple to do! Breathe in slowly and gently for a count of 3, hold for a moment, and then exhale slowly to a count of 4. As you do this, it might help you to close your eyes, or sit down. Carry on doing this for at least 1 minute.

Visualisation

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Make sure that there are no external distractions around you (for example, noise, light or other disturbances).
2. Concentrate on your breathing. Aim to breathe in to your stomach rather than from your chest. Breathing from your chest causes you to breathe in shallowly. Try and breathe in for three counts and breathe out for four counts. Concentrate on your breathing for a minute.
3. Imagine you are walking down three steps. Take in a breath for every one of these steps. At the bottom of the steps there is a door.
4. Walk through the door. You are in a place that makes you feel comfortable, free and happy. This can be a happy memory, a favourite room in your home, or anything else that feels relaxing.
5. Spend time in this environment for five minutes. What can you see? What can you feel? What can you smell? What can you hear?
6. When you are ready, make your way back out of this calm place, towards the door. Open the door and walk back up the three steps.

Muscle relaxation

1. Follow the first two steps from the above visualisation exercise.
2. Try to feel completely relaxed. Imagine your muscles getting heavier and heavier, sinking in to the ground underneath you. Your body should be feeling heavy, and your breathing slow, deep and controlled.
3. Concentrate on your toes. Curl your toes up towards you, hold this for five to ten seconds and relax.
4. Now you will tense your feet, hold this for five to ten seconds and relax.
5. Move to your ankles. Tense your ankles for five to ten seconds and relax.
6. Carry on doing this exercise for all of your muscles, slowly moving your way up your body until you reach your forehead.
7. After you have reached your forehead, concentrate on your breathing, and for every breath you take, your body is sinking slowly more into the ground. Concentrate on the parts of your body are touching the ground.

Further resources

Tavistock and Portman's Living Well Service

Advice and information on where to get further support to help and improve your physical health

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/care-and-treatment/treatments/physical-health/>

email: physicalhealthlead@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Drink Aware

Online advice and information for safer drinking

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

Please also talk to your clinician at the Trust for further advice and information on mindfulness.