

# **Section 5: Routes into treatment**

# **17. Getting help – treatment**

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### **17.1. Introduction**

You don't have to be drunk all the time to look for help with your drinking. If you are having problems and want to deal better with your drinking, there are services based in the community that can help.

In most cases, your offender manager can refer you to a service, or you can refer yourself.

For all services, your first appointment will be to assess how much you are drinking and what problems it is causing you, and to talk about the problem and the choices for help you have. This may range from just some advice or more detailed treatment from a specialist worker.

### **17.2. Services you can go to**

**GPs and Primary Care Teams** can offer advice and health checks for alcohol problems and are the first place to go for any medical problems (except in an emergency). GPs can refer you to specialist services. Some GP surgeries have special community alcohol workers. You can approach most specialist services yourself without going to see your doctor.

**Advice, information and counselling services** offer specialist help. Many of them are voluntary organisations (charities). They can offer different things: this may be one-to-one sessions with a worker – talking through issues – or working in a group with other people who are going through the same thing. Some have a 'helpline' so you talk to a skilled person or 'drop in' times when you can visit without making an appointment first.

Some services also use 'alternative' therapies such as acupuncture or shiatsu massage, which some people with alcohol problems have found helpful to relax more.

**Community Alcohol Teams** are part of the National Health Service, and are often teams of skilled professionals that may include doctors, community nurses, social workers and trained counsellors who can offer a range of help.

**Self-help groups** such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) (for individuals), Al Anon (for families) and Adfam (for partners and families affected by drugs and alcohol). AA and Al Anon use a 12-step programme based on abstinence -that is drinking no alcohol at all - which they think is the only real solution. These groups often meet regularly in local venues. AA and Al Anon have more than 3,000 local groups in the UK.

### **17.3. Alcohol detoxification**

If you have been drinking very heavily most days, your body will have been struggling to deal with all the alcohol. If you begin to reduce or stop drinking you may start to feel 'withdrawal' symptoms 3-8 hours after your last drink, as the effect of the alcohol wears off.

The withdrawal symptoms include: feeling sick, trembling, sweating, craving for alcohol, and just feeling awful. Some people – not many – have convulsions (fits). As a result, you may feel that you have to continue to drink alcohol regularly to prevent these symptoms.

Delirium tremens ('DTs') is a more severe reaction after stopping drinking alcohol. About 1 in 20 people who have alcohol withdrawal symptoms get DTs about 2-3 days after their last drink. Symptoms include: marked tremor (the shakes) and delirium (agitation, confusion, and seeing and hearing things that are not there). Some people have fits. Complications can develop such as dehydration and other serious physical problems. It is fatal in some cases.

### **17.4. What is detoxification?**

Detoxification or 'detox' involves taking a short course of a medicine which helps to prevent withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking alcohol. The most commonly used medicine is chlordiazepoxide (Librium).

Detox with the help of medication is not right for everybody. You need to talk to your GP and get specialist help. If this treatment is right for you then your own GP may suggest you go through a '**community detoxification**'. This would be done with you at home with support from an alcohol worker. A common plan is:

- A GP or doctor will prescribe a dose of medication for the first day that you stop drinking alcohol.
- You then gradually cut down the dose over the next 5-7 days. This usually prevents, or greatly reduces, the unpleasant withdrawal symptoms.
- You must agree not to drink any alcohol when you are going through detox.
- Your GP or an alcohol worker or community practice nurse will usually see you quite often during the time of detox.
- Support from family or friends can be of great help. Often the responsibility for getting the prescription and giving the medicine is shared with a family member or friend. For example, a partner or parent of the person going through detox.

#### **17.5. How will I feel going through a detoxification?**

Some people manage quite easily. Others find it more difficult. You can expect to:

- Feel quite nervous or anxious for a few days
- Have some difficulty with getting off to sleep for a few nights
- Have some mild withdrawal symptoms but they should not be too bad and a lot less than if you were not taking the medicine

The medication used for detox does not make you stop drinking. You need determination to stop. The medication simply helps you to feel better whilst your body readjusts to not having alcohol. After your detox, you will still have to deal with the issues surrounding you're drinking.

You are likely to be prescribed vitamins, particularly vitamin B1 (thiamine). This is because many people who drink heavily do not eat properly and can lack certain vitamins. A lack of vitamin B1 is the most common. A lack of this vitamin can cause serious brain conditions.

### **17.6. Detoxification with the help of other health professionals**

Some people are referred to a specialist drug and alcohol unit for detox. This is usually better for people who have other physical or mental health problems and for those who have:

- Little home or social support
- A history of severe withdrawal symptoms
- A physical illness caused by alcohol
- Had previous attempts to stop alcohol and have failed

The medicines used for detox in specialist units are much the same as GPs prescribe. However, these units have more staff and expertise for giving support. Some people with serious alcohol related problems are admitted to hospital to detox.

### **17.7. After detoxification and not drinking heavily**

After a successful detox, some people go back to drinking heavily again at some point. To help with these problems you may be offered a medication option.

#### **Medication**

You may be advised to take a medicine for several months to help you keep off alcohol. These medicines should only be used if you are seeing a doctor regularly. They can be dangerous and even poisonous if they are not used under medical supervision.

- **Acamprosate** and **naltrexone** are medicines which may help to ease alcohol cravings.
- **Disulfiram (Antabuse)** is another medicine which is sometimes used following a detox. When you take it you get very unpleasant symptoms if you drink any alcohol (such as flushing, vomiting, palpitations and headache), so that while you are taking the medicine, it puts you off wanting to drink.

### **17.8. Residential treatment**

Residential or rehabilitation treatment (rehab) is normally arranged through one of the community services listed above. There are residential centres all over the country so people can leave their own area for a short time. This can help them to address drinking problems and issues related to their drinking. 'Rehab' often starts with a few days of detox (see above) and then people live for 1-6 months with others in the same situation. They also go to support groups and other therapies to help them work towards a life where they can deal with their drinking. This placement is often in a place where no drink is allowed. There is usually a waiting list. Getting private treatment will be quicker but expensive.

### **17.9. Going it alone**

If you are drinking very heavily, it can be dangerous to stop drinking on your own.

But about one in three people who have an alcohol problem can cut down their drinking, or stop drinking altogether, without the need for professional help.

There are many self help books, leaflets, and web sites (for instance this pack) that offer help and advice about how you can stop or cut down your drinking. If you have problems with accommodation there may be hostels that allow you to stay and also drink on the site, but some are what they call 'dry hostels'.

**Important:** Coming off alcohol too quickly could be very dangerous. You should get a doctor to give you advice before you try to stop. Talk to your offender manager. Think about what you gain when you stop. Think about what you lose if you start again. If you have stopped before without problems don't think that there will be no risk this time.

### **17.10. Other health problems**

Sometimes drinking alcohol covers up other underlying health problems. For example, people with an alcohol related problem often also have problems with stress, anxiety, depression, or other mental health problems. If you feel you may have a mental health problem, you should see your GP who will be able to describe the options for you. Always remember that heavy drinking increases the risk of other problems getting worse.

Go to chapter 18, *Contact numbers (support services)*, for telephone helpline numbers and how to find a local treatment or support service in your area.

# **18. Contact numbers (support services)**

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## 18.1. Alcohol related links

There are a number of ways to find a service or a place that can give you more advice in your local area:

- 1) Ask your offender manager.
- 2) Phone Drinkline. This is a freephone helpline on 0800 917 8282.
- 3) The Alcohol Concern website has a list of services across England and Wales at [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk) (look under Help and Information for Alcohol Services Directory) or phone 020 7264 0510.
- 4) Look in the phonebook or Yellow Pages under:
  - alcohol
  - counselling and advice
  - local health services or GPs
  - self-help groups.
- 5) Go to your local GP or health centre. They will be able to have a chat with you or give you information on where to go.
- 6) Often your local library will have leaflets regarding health services, including alcohol advice services.

Also, most of the organisations listed below can give you advice and help or can point you to a better option locally.

Some services are open outside of 'office hours'. If not, you can call one of the helplines listed in this chapter.

**Drinkline**

Helpline: 365 days, best time to call Mon – Fri 9a.m. – 11p.m.

The free confidential helpline offers information and advice on alcohol to anyone concerned or worried about their own drinking. Also, offers support to family and friends by providing information on available support services. Self-help material can be supplied and, if appropriate, referral to local alcohol advice agencies.

Referral: Any

Cost: Free

Helpline: 0800 917 8282

**Alcoholics Anonymous**

Helpline: Every day 10am-10pm.

The AA is a voluntary fellowship of men and women who are alcoholics and who will help each other to become and stay sober by sharing experiences and giving mutual support. There are over 3,000 groups throughout the UK dedicated to helping those with a serious alcohol problem achieve and maintain sobriety.

Who for: Anyone who has a problem with alcohol

Referral: Self

Cost: Calls to helpline charged at local rate

Check with local meeting for access.

Some information is available in other languages.

[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

Helpline: 0845 769 7555

E-mail: [help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](mailto:help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

**National Teetotallers Register**

Helpline: 7 days 9.00am-9.00pm

TT Register aims to offer initial help and information by correspondence exchange to people with alcohol related problems. Support is also offered for those wishing to sustain a 'stay-dry' lifestyle.

Helpline: 01323 638234

**National Association for Children of Alcoholics**

Helpline: Mon, Tue and Fri 10am-7pm, Wed-Thu 10am-9pm, Sat 10am-3pm  
(answerphone available)

The Association provides information, advice and support to children of alcoholics and to professionals who deal with children of alcoholics. NACOA provides a listening service, a website, responds to emails and letters and sends out information packs.

Referral: Self

Cost: No charge for information

[www.nacoa.org.uk](http://www.nacoa.org.uk)

Helpline: 0800 358 3456

**18.2. Other useful helplines and resources****Drinkaware Trust**

The Drinkaware Trust is an alcohol industry funded body that aims to help reduce alcohol misuse and minimise alcohol-related harm. It provides extensive information and resources at:

[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk) and [www.truthaboutbooze.co.uk](http://www.truthaboutbooze.co.uk)

**Down Your Drink**

The Down Your Drink project is jointly run by Alcohol Concern and University College London Medical School. It provides a website that offers different resources to allow people to make informed choices.

[www.downyourdrink.org.uk](http://www.downyourdrink.org.uk)

**FRANK**

Helpline: 365 days, 24 hours (there may be charges for calls made from mobile phones)

Frank is a confidential drugs helpline which offers information and advice for anyone concerned about their own, or someone else's drug or solvent use. Callers can be signposted to local services and have literature posted to them.

Who for: Anyone

Referral: Self

Cost: Free

Translators can be arranged through Language Line, for speakers of other languages.

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

Helpline: 0800 77 66 00

**MIND**

Mind is a mental health charity which offers advice and support to service users. They have a network of local associations in England and Wales to which people can turn for help and assistance, including help on benefits, employment, housing and legal problems.

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Tel: 0845 766 0163 (Mon to Fri 9.15 a.m. – 5.15 p.m.)

E-mail: [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

**Samaritans**

Helpline: 365 days a year, 24 hours.

Samaritans is available 24 hours a day to provide confidential, emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. Samaritans is a completely confidential service and callers need not give their name. Local branches are listed in the telephone book. Contact methods include letter, phone, text, email and face to face.

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Helpline: 08457 90 90 90

Text Message Phone: 07725 909090

E-mail: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### **Narcotics Anonymous**

Telephone helpline and regular self-help meetings for addicts who have a desire to stop using and who wish to support each other in remaining drug-free.

[www.ukna.org](http://www.ukna.org)

Tel: 0845 373 3366 or 020 7730 0009

### **Adfam**

Offers support to families around drugs and alcohol.

[adfam.org.uk](http://adfam.org.uk)

Tel: 020 7553 7640

E-mail: [admin@adfam.org.uk](mailto:admin@adfam.org.uk)

**Al-Anon**

Understanding and support for families and friends of problem drinkers, whether the person is still drinking or not.

[www.al-anonuk.org.uk](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)

Tel: 020 7403 0888 (Helpline 10am - 10pm, 365 days a year)

E-mail: [enquiries@al-anonuk.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@al-anonuk.org.uk)

**NHS Smoking Helpline**

Friendly advice and support from a specialist advisor about giving up smoking.

[www.givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk)

Tel: 0800 169 0 169 (general helpline) (365 days, 7 a.m. – 11 p.m.)

0800 169 9 169 (smoking during pregnancy helpline)

**Quitline**

Helpline for smokers who want to stop and people trying to remain as ex-smokers.

[www.quit.org.uk](http://www.quit.org.uk)

Tel: 0800 00 22 00

**Release**

Advice, counselling and information on drug health, welfare and legal issues.

[www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk)

Tel: 0845 4500 215

E-mail: [ask@release.org.uk](mailto:ask@release.org.uk)

Helpline: 10am to 10pm Mon -Thur and 10am to midnight Fri, Sat and Sun

The helpline offers confidential help, practical advice and support to people affected by phobias including agoraphobia, general anxiety, panic attacks, obsessional and compulsive disorders, anorexia and bulimia or tranquilliser withdrawal. Also offers support for carers of those with borderline personality disorder. Membership includes a newsletter, pen pal lists, audio and visual tapes, fact sheets self-help booklets and book list.

Who for: Anyone.

Referral: Self.

Cost: Optional £10 annual membership fee.

There is a complaints procedure.

[www.first-steps.org](http://www.first-steps.org)

Helpline: 0845 120 2916

General Number: 01926 864473

E-mail: [first.steps@btconnect.com](mailto:first.steps@btconnect.com)

### **National Phobics' Society**

National membership organisation providing help and advice for sufferers, their carers and families. Offers information factsheets and self-help guides for a wide range of phobias.

Tel: 0870 122 2325 (Mon-Fri 9.15am- 9pm)

E-mail: [info@phobics-society.org.uk](mailto:info@phobics-society.org.uk)

Also:

[www.destigmatize.org.uk](http://www.destigmatize.org.uk)

E-mail: [info@destigmatize.org.uk](mailto:info@destigmatize.org.uk) or [amo@destigmatize.org.uk](mailto:amo@destigmatize.org.uk)

A new organization working with the National Phobic's Society which aims to provide information and support for sufferers of anxiety disorders mainly, but not exclusively, in the Asian population.

### **Triumph Over Phobia**

Triumph Over Phobia runs a series of self-help groups to help people with phobia learn to overcome their fears through small interactions with their phobias. Includes some information on phobias, but the focus is on the self-help groups.

[www.topuk.org](http://www.topuk.org)

Tel: 0845 600 9601

E-mail: [info@topuk.org](mailto:info@topuk.org)

### **Rethink**

Advice line: Open 10am -3pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday; 10am- 1pm Tuesday and Thursday

National voluntary organisation that helps people with any severe mental illness, their families and carers.

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

Tel: 020 8974 6814

E-mail: [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

### **National Schizophrenia Fellowship (Scotland)**

Works to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of those affected by schizophrenia and other mental illness, including families and carers.

[www.nsfscot.org.uk](http://www.nsfscot.org.uk)

Tel: 0131 557 8969

E-mail: [info@nsfscot.org.uk](mailto:info@nsfscot.org.uk)

### **Saneline**

Helpline: 1pm to 11pm every day of the year

A national mental health helpline offering emotional support and practical information for people with mental illness, families, carers and professionals.

[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

Helpline: 0845 767 8000

E-mail: [sanemail@sane.org.uk](mailto:sanemail@sane.org.uk)

**Citizens Advice**

The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice.

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

**NHS Direct**

A 24 hour service delivering telephone and e-health information and advice to enable patients to make decisions about their healthcare and that of their families.

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

Tel: 0845 4647