

What should I do if I've had a substance use problem before?

For people in recovery, experiencing a disaster or emergency can trigger strong urges to use substances again. For others, it makes them more committed to recovery. No matter what you're going through, it's important to make a choice to stay in recovery. Here are a few suggestions to help you:

- talk with friends and family about how they can support you to prevent a relapse
- reach out to supports that have helped you before like a counsellor, sponsor, your workplace Family Employee Assistance Program (FEAP), or a healthcare provider
- attend a self-help or support group more often

If your support group has been displaced, or you've move out of your community, contact Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to find a meeting or virtual supports (e.g., online meeting, group chats) in your area.



1-877-303-2642

Mental Health Helpline

1-866-332-2322

Addiction Helpline

Confidential, free support is available 24/7

➤ To order this resource go to:
<https://dol.datacm.com/>
Login ID: mentalhealthresources
Password: mh2016
Item Number: DR014

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Substance Use and Disasters or Emergencies



Everyone reacts differently after a disaster or emergency. Some people may use substances as a way to relax, deal with their emotions, or cope with a stressful situation.

Substances are anything that alters your mood, mind, or state. They include things like alcohol, caffeine, tobacco or vaping products, cannabis, illegal drugs, and over-the-counter or prescription medications.

Using substances changes your brain's ability to deal with stressful situations and negative feelings.

Short-term use may:

- make it hard for you to control your actions
- affect your safety and the safety of the people around you
- increase the risk of family violence
- lead to accidents (e.g., driving or using equipment while impaired)
- lead to sleep problems
- make it harder for you to think clearly or make decisions

Long-term use may:

- affect your relationships with family and friends
- lead to long-term health problems (e.g., diabetes, obesity, certain cancers)
- increase your risk of becoming dependent on substances
- increase negative feelings like anger, aggression, sadness, or thoughts of suicide

If you're thinking about suicide, hurting yourself, or hurting others, call the Mental Health Helpline **1-877-303-2642**, go to the nearest emergency department, or call **911**.

How can I manage my substance in a disaster?

- pay attention to any change in your substance use (e.g., increase in amount or frequency)
- take care of yourself by:
 - eating healthy
 - being physical active everyday
 - getting enough sleep
 - practicing relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, and stretching to help manage your stress
- connect and stay connected with your social supports (e.g., friends, family, support groups)
- avoid mixing alcohol and other drugs—this can cause harmful or fatal interactions
- talk to a healthcare provider about safe ways to help with anxiety, depression, and sleep problems

If you're having trouble managing your substance use, talk to a trusted friend, counsellor, support person in your life, or a healthcare provider. For information about managing your substance use, support options, or referrals to services in your area, call the Addiction Helpline **1-866-332-2322**.

In a disaster, there are times when not using substances is the best choice.

This includes when:

- emotions are high (e.g., anger, sadness, grief)
- driving a vehicle, using tools, or operating machinery
- taking prescription medication
- you're responsible for others
- you need to move or act quickly
- you have to make important decisions
- you're living with mental or physical health problems
- you're pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant

How can you tell if your substance use is becoming a problem?

- you're using substances more than usual
- you find it hard to cut back or stop
- you're using substances to cope with your feelings or stressful situations
- friends, family, or co-workers have told you they're concerned about your substance use
- you hide your substance use from family and friends
- while using substances you:
 - can't remember things you've said or done
 - have harmed yourself or others
 - you feel like you can't stop

All substances can be misused, even if your doctor prescribes them. Use prescription and over-the-counter medications only as directed. If you feel your medicine isn't working talk to a healthcare provider.