

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

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## Substance misuse

Substance misuse, also known as substance use disorder, affects a person's capacity to control their use of a legal or illegal drug and medications. Substances include alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine, and many others. If you're dependent, you might use the substance even if it causes harm to you. But you're not on your own—we're here to support you.

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# What is substance misuse?

People who abuse substances may develop a misuse of them. They might have difficulty in their attempts to discontinue drug use and experience cravings or withdrawal symptoms.

Other [signs of substance misuse](#) include:

- ▶ Desire to increase substance intake to get the same effects - this is known as "tolerance" (one may take even more before feeling the effects)
- ▶ Withdrawing from social or recreational activities (not meeting work and school expectations, etc)
- ▶ Continuing drug use whilst knowing the negative effects and harm to one's own physical and/or mental health
- ▶ Purchasing drugs despite known financial burdens

**Remember:** It's normal to feel conflicted about discontinuing drug use. Recovery requires time, motivation, and support, but you can overcome your misuse and regain control of your life by making a commitment to change and engaging with professional support.

## The complexity of substance misuse

Substance misuse is not as simple as it seems. There are many factors that underlie the dependent behaviours one may have when using substances like drugs and alcohol. This can include:

- ▶ Abnormalities in the motivational system that were not directly caused by the dependent activity (e.g. related to chronic anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor impulse control, etc.)
- ▶ Abnormalities in the motivational system are caused by the addictive activity acting on susceptibilities in that system (e.g. sensitisation to the effects of stimulant drugs, tolerance and withdrawal symptoms, and mood disturbance arising from social effects of the behaviour)
- ▶ Social environments that act on essentially normal motivational systems that are not equipped to cope with them (e.g. lifestyle of public icons, particular social relationships and people in chronically distressing circumstances)

### *Stages of change model*

Stages of change model is highly relevant for dependent behaviours and cessation of drugs or substances.

- ▶ Precontemplation: In this stage, you are not intent to start healthy behaviour or stop using substances.
- ▶ Contemplation: You are intent to start healthy behaviour or stop using substances.

- ▶ Preparation: You are ready to start taking action within the next 30 days.
- ▶ Action: You have stopped using substances within the last 6 months and need to work hard to keep the cessation.
- ▶ Maintenance: You have stopped using substances more than 6 months.

## Strategies to manage substance misuse

The first step towards recovery is frequently the most difficult for those who are struggling with misuse: ***recognising misuse and you are determined to take action***. It's normal to feel uncertain of when to stop using or whether you're ready to begin your recovery.

Here are some tips for you to prepare for change:

- ▶ Make a list of the pros and cons of stopping drug use (consider costs and the benefits)
- ▶ Monitor your drug use, including the amount and timing of your use. You will have a clearer understanding of the part the misuse is playing in your life.
- ▶ Set clear, measurable objectives, including a start date or drug usage restrictions.
- ▶ Share your commitment to recovery with your loved ones and ask for their support.
- ▶ Think about your past attempts at recovery, if any. What worked? What didn't?

**Remember:** It is incredibly important to be aware that suddenly stopping the use of alcohol and drug use can be dangerous and cause serious harm. You can discuss your options with a health professional or a drug and alcohol service

*It's time to explore your **treatment options** once you've made the decision to pursue recovery.*

**Counselling and lifestyle changes** – You can learn to cope without medicines with the help of individual or group counselling. This is possible if your drug use has been mild. Peer support groups are frequently conducted by those in recovery; their personal experiences can be beneficial to others.

To learn more about **medications**, speak with your GP and an AOC specialist. Medication may be used to manage withdrawal symptoms, prevent relapse, or treat any co-occurring mental health condition such as depression or anxiety.

- ▶ **detoxification** – you stop taking drugs and have medical treatment (known as pharmacotherapy) while your body clears the drug from your system
- ▶ **rehabilitation** – this is a long-term treatment where you stay in a hospital or clinic, or [at home](#). It also involves psychological treatment to help you deal with issues that may have contributed to your drug use

*It is also important to minimize substance cravings and triggers during recovery*

- ▶ Occupying yourself with activities like exercising or listening to music
- ▶ Avoiding areas where you know there will be drugs and drink available
- ▶ Step away from your friends who use
- ▶ Talk to friends or family members about craving when it occurs
- ▶ **Urge surfing** - Many people try to tough it out in order to control their cravings. However, sometimes cravings are too powerful to ignore. When this happens, it can be useful to stay with the urge until it passes. Urges last approximately 15 minutes and if you pay attention, they will be gone before you even know it. This method is known as urge surfing. Imagine yourself as a surfer, visualize yourself riding the wave of your drug craving and remaining on top of it until it crests, breaks, and transforms into weaker, foamy waves. When you ride out the craving, without fighting, judging, or ignoring the urge, you'll notice that it fades more rapidly than you might expect. Learn more about urge surfing in this [article](#).

### *Preventing a relapse*

Relapse happens frequently during the drug dependent rehabilitation process. Relapse can be depressing and distressing, but it can also be a chance to learn from your mistakes, find new triggers, and modify your treatment plan. It's important to keep in mind that relapse does not indicate that drug treatment failed. **Don't give up.** Call your friends, speak with your therapist, attend a meeting, or make a doctor's appointment.

## Substance misuse and my studies

Substance misuse can make it hard to manage due dates, stay organised, and focus on assignments, all of which can make doing well at university harder. However, with the right university, community, and social supports, you can take control and manage your studies in a way that work for you.

- ▶ **Seek services for your well-being:** It may be helpful to speak to someone professional, whether it's on or off campus, particularly someone who will hold an objective lens to your situation. Getting help from the WSU Wellbeing services or attending a counselling session can encourage a safe space to talk about your misuse and ways to manage it with your studies
- ▶ **Obtain Social Support:** Having supportive people in your life is paramount to balancing your recovery journey and studies. This may mean reaching out to your existing network or confiding in a family member or distant friend can provide you with the [social support](#) you need.

- ▶ **Find activities that you enjoy:** Finding the balance between your studies and strategies to manage your recovery is essential. Scheduling in time for hobbies or activities that you enjoy can help you focus and feel at ease when studying
- ▶ **Take a break:** It's okay to step back from your studies if recovery is overwhelming. There are many university supports that can help you transition off of and back into your studies if you need, as well as any modifying your current study load into part time studies.

## University Support

WSU resources:

If substance misuse is creating barriers that may affect your study or you want support to optimise your study then the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- ▶ **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or telephone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370 or sending an email to [counselling@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:counselling@westernsydney.edu.au). Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30 pm.

- ▶ **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email [disability@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:disability@westernsydney.edu.au) or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- **WSU [Student Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- ▶ **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email [d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au).

▶ **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

▶ **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

▶ **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

▶ **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

▶ **Leave of absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice

particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

## Community Support

Community resources:

- **[Lifeline](#)**.

If you are really struggling during the night when completing assessments or feel most alone, contact [Lifeline](#) (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14** or, Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back!

- **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

[Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#) - 1800 011 511

This Mental Health Line is staffed by mental health professionals that can help and provide you advice about your needs and discuss referrals to local mental health services. It is available to everyone in NSW and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- ▶ Talk to your doctor or your alcohol and other drugs (AOD) specialists about reducing and quitting drugs. Don't hesitate to talk with AOD specialist or a doctor as quitting drugs on your own can be dangerous.
- ▶ [24/7 Alcohol and Drug Support Lines](#) - calling **(08) 9442 5000** or **1800 198 024**
- ▶ [Community Alcohol and Drug Service \(CASD\)](#) – these services are free and confidential and provide you and your family with alcohol and other drug treatment and support services in the community.
- ▶ [The Alcohol and Drug Foundation](#) offered a range of information, resources, and programmes on drug misuse and withdrawal symptoms. Additionally, there is a DrugInfo helpline that provides free, confidential information and guidance on minimising harm, available treatments, and support services. Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. Call 1300 85 85 84.

- ▶ Here is a useful [help guide](#) for you or your loved one to overcome drug misuse.

## Resources

- ▶ [Podcasts](#)
- ▶ [Videos](#)
- ▶ [Apps](#)

### Podcasts

#### **The Addicted Mind Podcast**

This podcast is about understanding misuse from a research and treatment perspective. Episodes range from discussing the misuse process to what recovery from misuse can look like from a variety of different people.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/the-addicted-mind-podcast/id1268632042>

<https://open.spotify.com/show/3w4Kwemc2tQWz6VYMqKHtY>

#### **“Tim Lodgen – My Story of Addiction, Hope and Recovery”**

Tim Lodgen shares his story of misuse to alcohol and drugs, and his journey of hope towards recovery.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/tim-lodgen-my-story-of-addiction-hope-and-recovery/id1230272889?i=1000571506631>

### Videos

#### **How Drug Addiction Works**



## The Stigma of Addiction | Tony Hoffman | TEDxFresnoState

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuooVrSpffk>

### Apps

You might find it helpful to try the following apps (all are free and available on IOS & Android) if you have substance misuse:

- ▶ **[I am sober:](#)** I am Sober is **an misuse buddy useful for quitting any activity or substance**. With daily tracking, advice and quotes from other users, this app is focused on creating motivation and support while trying to quit.
- ▶ **[AODconnect app:](#)** It helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to find culturally appropriate support for alcohol and other drug issues
- ▶ **[Sober Grid:](#)** This social networking app allows people to connect with other sober individuals in their local community and worldwide.
- ▶ **[Nomo:](#)** Nomo tracks how long a person has been sobered in terms of years, months, weeks, days, hours, and minutes. Each time a person reaches a recovery milestone, the app issues a chip to celebrate the achievement and keep people motivated.
- ▶ **[Smoke Free:](#)** This app takes a science-backed approach with more than 20 evidence-based techniques to help you quit smoking for good.
- ▶ **[My Quitbuddy:](#)** Quitting smoking can be difficult but My QuitBuddy is here to help you every step of the way. Designed to deliver you support in a way best suited to you, for you to get quit and stay smoke-free.

### Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional.

Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

**View a PDF version of this webpage [here](#).**

References:

[Western Sydney University- Disruption to Studies Policy](#)

[Western Sydney University- Withdrawing without academic penalty](#)

[Western Sydney University- Counselling Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- Student Welfare Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- WesternNow](#)

[Western Sydney University- Chaplaincy](#)

[Western Sydney University- TalkCampus](#)

[Beyond Blue- Online chat](#)

[WebMD – Signs of Drug Addiction](#)

[Lifeline – Substance Misuse and Addiction](#)

[Boston University School of Public Health – Stages of Change](#)