



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:
MANAGING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Version 2, 4/20/20

Are you in recovery from a substance use disorder (SUD) and working on maintaining sobriety during the COVID-19 pandemic? Are you struggling with a current SUD and motivated to get help? Can't go to a self-help meeting because of physical distancing? Or maybe you don't have a SUD but find yourself drinking, smoking cigarettes, or using illicit drugs more during the pandemic? You are not alone! The COVID-19 pandemic is disruptive to everyone's daily routines and structure. This can be particularly difficult if you are living with a SUD. People managing a SUD are often encouraged to avoid isolation and maintain social networks, which is difficult when we are told to stay at home and follow physical distancing guidelines. You are not able to go to your regular support group meetings or see your individual therapist in person. You may feel anxious, fearful and helpless because of the uncertainty and disrupted routine. This is understandable and a common reaction. To help manage distressing feelings, people in recovery may feel tempted to use alcohol or drugs again to cope, and those with active SUDs might use larger amounts or use more frequently. Those who don't usually struggle with a SUD might start using alcohol, cigarettes, or illicit drugs in this stressful time. In addition, people who smoke, vape, use opioids or have a SUD are at increased risk for COVID-19 infection because these substances can damage the respiratory system, which COVID-19 targets. To help maintain or achieve sobriety during COVID-19; address heavier alcohol, smoking, or drug use than usual; and be aware of higher risk of infection, here are some tips. Helpful resources are also included.

Prioritize Maintaining your Sobriety

- Create a new schedule to provide structure in your day
 - Make your daily schedule and avoid unaccounted time during the day which can fuel negative feelings and trigger cravings
 - Schedule and consistently attend virtual self-help, support groups and therapy
 - Ensure your schedule includes adequate time for sleep, meals, exercise, work, spiritual activities if applicable, virtual social time, and enjoyable activities
 - Strive to stick with your schedule and account for as much time as possible to avoid feeling anxious, stressed, bored, or unproductive, which can lead to cravings



- Be mindful of loneliness, anxiety and uncomfortable feelings
 - Stay connected to loved ones and sponsors to avoid isolation and loneliness
 - Schedule virtual meetings or phone calls to check in
 - Consider planning virtual group exercise or meditation with friends
 - Make a plan for managing difficult emotions
 - Make a schedule of available virtual meetings so you have quick access to one if needed
 - Prepare a list of mindfulness exercises such as breathing techniques, staying in the present moment without judgement, using your five senses to observe, or meditating
 - Build a support network of trusted friends, family, sponsors, or group members who you can reach out to – make sure you have a list of contact information you can easily access
- Reach out to your sobriety treatment team frequently
 - Make frequent contact, even if not in crisis, to strengthen your relationships
 - Start or continue regular contact with a sponsor or therapist, utilizing technology if possible (e.g. FaceTime, Zoom, Skype)
- Continue any medications used to help manage cravings, and if you are on medication-assisted treatment, such as methadone or buprenorphine, discuss with your doctor how you will access your medications

Reduce or Eliminate Excessive Smoking, Alcohol or Drug Use

- Stay connected
 - Prioritize relationships as sometimes people turn to cigarette smoking, alcohol or drug use when lonely or bored
 - Talk with trusted friends or family when you are feeling anxious, scared, or lonely or when you are craving a substance
 - Use technology to connect with others
 - Schedule virtual social events such as meals or group exercise
- Maintain a schedule including regular exercise and virtual social activities
- Consider keeping a food and drink log such as My Fitness Pal to help monitor alcohol
- Use mindfulness techniques
 - Try to label any emotions you're feeling when you feel the urge to smoke, drink or use drugs
 - Consider another option for addressing these emotions such as meditating, exercising, calling a friend or family member, or participating in a distracting activity such as watching a movie
- Maintain a nonjudgmental stance for yourself



- Remind yourself that many people feel anxious and scared
- Avoid negative self-talk
- Say kind and positive things to yourself

Monitor Your Physical Health

- Know the signs of COVID-19 infection
 - See the [CDC](#) website for this information
 - Remember that withdrawal from some substances (such as opioids) and signs of COVID-19 infection may be similar
 - Seek medical attention if you feel short of breath, have chest pain or tightness, or are coughing up blood
- Continue any prescribed medications recommended by your doctor – stopping prescribed medications without guidance can cause withdrawal symptoms
- Ensure adequate sleep and nutrition
- Follow guidelines to avoid infecting yourself or others
 - Maintain physical distancing
 - Wash your hands correctly and frequently
 - Avoid touching your face
 - Cover your mouth when coughing then wash hands
 - Wear a face covering

Helpful Resources

Online Self-Help Groups

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Online Intergroup: aa-intergroup.org
- AA Meeting Online: aameetingonline.com
- AA-Alive: aa-alive.net
- One Day at a Time: google.com/site/onedayatatime1pm
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings online: virtual-na.org
- NA by Phone: nabyphone.com
- Never Alone Club (NA): neveraloneclub.org
- Cocaine Anonymous: ca-online.org
- In The Rooms: An Online Addiction Recovery Community: intherooms.com

Additional online recovery resources as published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) can be found [here](#)