

The Teamsters Local 922- Employers Health Trust

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Helpful Hints & Reminders

Anxiety and Alcohol: A Dangerous Pairing

When dealing with tense or stressful situations, many people find themselves unwinding with a glass of wine or beer. While this could be containable, relatively harmless for some, those who suffer from persistent anxiety are liable to develop a drinking problem, also known as an alcohol use disorder (AUD). In these cases, the two disorders co-occur, each one making the other worse over time. But help with both conditions is possible, through self-care measures and treatment options, as we discuss next.



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Common Symptoms

On one level, anxiety is the body’s natural response to stress, a manageable sense of apprehension which can help us prepare accordingly for the task at hand—a job interview, first date, etc. Some people, however, suffer from anxiety disorders, where the feeling is constant or nearly so, and apparently unconnected to any anticipated event. Some common symptoms of anxiety disorders include:

- constant feelings of nervousness
- feelings of powerlessness
- sense of imminent danger
- increased heart and respiration rate
- sweating
- tremors
- fatigue
- difficulty concentrating
- suicidal thoughts or actions

Connection with Alcohol

If left untreated, the anxiety disorder will become more debilitating. In response, an unfortunate number of people turn to self-medication through drugs and alcohol for a fleeting sense of relief from their symptoms.

The complicated relationship of anxiety and alcohol is an important thing to keep in mind. Many people find that a drink of alcohol ‘calms the nerves’ in stressful situations. It might not seem like a big deal, and for many it is not, but for those who suffer from an anxiety disorder, the combination of anxiety and alcohol can lead down a dangerous path. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year. Although it is highly treatable, only 36.9% of those suffering receive treatment.

Combine that with more than 15 million adults in the U.S. who struggle with some form of AUD and we have a very dangerous situation on our hands. Alcohol is the third leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., with more than 88,000 people dying every single year from alcohol-related causes! Those who struggle with anxiety are twice as likely¹ as the rest of the population to suffer from a co-occurring substance abuse disorder. When this occurs, it is called comorbidity. Each illness is likely to complicate and exacerbate the other, leading to a dangerous and ever worsening cycle.

Self-Care Tools

The good news is that in addition to treatment there are a number of self-care tools you can use to manage your anxiety. What is self-care? Generally, it is the conscious steps we take to improve our physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Psychologists have identified several kinds of self-care, including:

- **physical activities:** taking a walk or attending a yoga class

- **sensory activities:** savoring a scented candle, cuddling with a pet, or relaxing in a hot bath
- **emotional activities:** journaling, experiencing emotions as they arise, practicing self-compassion
- **spiritual activities:** meditation or religious practice
- **social activities:** spending time with friends or a support group

Recovery Centers of America

As empowering as these activities can be, it might be that a greater level of care is called for in treating your drinking and anxiety. Recovery Centers of America is an inpatient detox and residential drug and alcohol facility with two locations in Maryland. They offer a comprehensive treatment program, attending to the needs of mind, body and spirit, to make their patients whole again. Programs help them not only break their dependency on drugs and alcohol but learn coping skills to deal with life as it is, come to

terms with the past and manage their thoughts, emotions and actions.

If you or a loved one is struggling with drugs or alcohol, please call your local treatment advocate, Sarah Daniel, with Recovery Centers of America now at **509-438-6583** or call **1-800-RECOVERY** for more information.

Selected Plan Benefits Summary**

Mental Health Inpatient - \$250 copayment per admission – In-Network. **Requires authorization in advance under the utilization management program.**

Mental Health Inpatient Professional Services 100% In-Network.

Substance Abuse Inpatient Facility Services - \$250 copayment per admission. **Requires authorization in advance under the utilization management program.**

Substance Abuse Inpatient Professional Services 100% In-Network.

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<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/common->

comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/introduction

