

April is Alcohol Awareness Month Self-medicating and Alcohol: Did You Know?

A phrase often thrown around when discussing alcohol misuse is *self-medication*. Although the definition is fairly clear, our understanding of what self-medication looks like in the real world is much more vague. The American Addictions Centers define self-medication as abusing substances such as drugs or alcohol “to mask symptoms of a mental health issue.” Let’s break that down further.

Imagine that you’re experiencing symptoms of depression. Seemingly inexplicably you occasionally feel a sense of hopelessness and a lack of motivation to do much of anything. Perhaps it takes a real effort to laugh or even smile at a friend’s joke. In those moments your reaction might be to have a drink – let’s say you usually enjoy yourself when you go out drinking with friends, so you think, why not? *I’ll have a drink now to cheer myself up and have some fun.* However, alcohol is a depressant – it’s likely to make you feel even more depressed. So, in fact, self-medication is a misnomer.

Here’s the real kicker: when you self-medicate a potential behavioral health problem with alcohol or another substance, you’re likely hiding that problem from yourself as much as anyone else. That’s why it’s important to check in on your behavioral health just as doctors recommend you get an annual physical to evaluate your physical health. Take a screening today and find out if you should take a closer look at your mental health or substance use.

- You don’t have to be having a major problem to readdress your relationship with alcohol. Take a screening and get insight into your drinking habits. <https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/MIIAWellness>
- About one third of those with a behavioral health diagnosis misuse alcohol or other substances. It often takes treatment to overcome both. You can start with a screening. <https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/MIIAWellness>
- Many people turn to alcohol to help “self-medicate” their behavioral health struggles – but in reality, relying on addictive substances like alcohol only makes problems worse. Take a screening to learn the signs of alcohol use disorder. <https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/MIIAWellness>