



Coping with Unhealthy Alcohol Use during the COVID-19 Pandemic

For your patients with unhealthy alcohol use or other addictions, the COVID-19 pandemic can create extra stressors. These patients may be experiencing:

- **Anxiety**
People with unhealthy alcohol use often report higher levels of anxiety than others. Uncertainty and fear during this time may heighten feelings of worry and lead to unhealthy coping strategies.
- **Loneliness**
Social distancing can be particularly challenging for those who rely on in-person support networks to manage their addictions.
- **An increase in drinking**
A rise in alcohol use is common during crisis situations as people look for ways to handle stress.
- **Unintended alcohol withdrawal syndrome**
Business closures and quarantine may lead to limited access to alcohol. In cases of severe withdrawal, seizures, delirium, and even death can occur. Check out the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) guideline: <https://bit.ly/2Vbz7gx>

You can help your patients cope during this difficult time.

Here are some useful tips:

- Encourage patients to connect frequently with family and friends
 - Phone calls, video calls, emails, and texting are all great ways to check in
- Promote relaxation and healthy coping strategies
 - Deep breathing, yoga, meditation, and prayer are all tools that may ease tension
 - Journal writing may help patients manage worries
- When appropriate, share support group resources. Many are now offering free-of-charge **virtual/remote meetings**:
 - Alcoholics Anonymous offers online meetings – www.aa-intergroup.org – and phone meetings – <http://aaphonemeetings.org>
 - SMART Recovery offers mutual support meetings – www.smartrecovery.org
- When appropriate, refer patients to behavioral providers that offer telehealth
- Refer to national and local recovery community resources provided by the Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network: <https://bit.ly/2VbKO6U>

Patients experiencing extreme stress should reach out to their healthcare team or visit <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov> for referrals.

INSPIRE

INSPIRE is a new federally-funded research program supporting clinicians to help their patients reduce unhealthy alcohol use. The study will use evidence-based quality improvement (QI) support to increase Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) in the primary care setting. For more information, visit www.healthinformationforall.org/project/inspire.