



Alcohol and the brain

As anyone who has ever had an alcoholic drink will know, alcohol can make you more chatty, more confident, and less coherent. It slows your mental and physical reactions and reduces your ability to think, reason and remember. That's why it's never a good idea to have alcohol before undertaking any potentially dangerous task – including driving, of course.

These short-term symptoms generally pass once we sober up again, but long-term heavy drinking can bring about more serious changes in our brains.

Alcohol and Mental Health

As well as physically harming the brain, overuse of alcohol can also have an impact on our mental health. In particular, it can lead to low mood and anxiety, and can worsen the symptoms of other pre-existing mental health problems. Use of alcohol to manage the symptoms of mental ill-health can often mask underlying problems, meaning they're not properly addressed.

Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD)

What is ARBD?

Alcohol Related Brain Damage is an umbrella term covering several different brain conditions directly linked to excessive drinking. Most of these conditions impact on the sufferer's memory and thinking. Research suggests that around 35% of dependent drinkers have some form of ARBD.

The good news is that, if recognised early and appropriate measures are put in place, as many as 75% of people can experience some degree of improvement.

- **Why?** *(Why would someone be at risk of ARBD?)*
 - The amount of alcohol that is consumed; 50+ units per week for men and 35+ units per week for women *(approx. 5 bottles of wine or 20 pints)*
 - Consistently drinking at that level for at least 5 years
 - Maintaining a poor diet and poor living standards
 - Repeated withdrawal/detox from alcohol
- **What?** *(What does it look like when someone has ARBD?)*
 - Early onset symptoms can include; *low motivation, no follow through, poor decision making, impulsivity, irritability and personality change*

- Short term memory issues such as; *being unable to recall a conversation from the morning to the afternoon, missed appointments, unable to learn/fathom new technology like phones & TV's, frequently leaving things on like the cooker & taps, unable to follow a new recipe even when provided and unable to go somewhere new on public transport*
 - Confusion
 - Unsteady gait, problems with walking and other movement
 - More severe diagnosis can include Wernicke's Encephalopathy and Korsakoff's Syndrome
- **Where? (Where does someone go for help and support with ARBD?)**
 - Contact your local GP/Health Professional
 - Contact Drink Wise Age Well on 0800 161 5780 / drinkwiseagewell.org.uk. We can offer support, guidance, signposting and access to E-Learning & face to face Training on ARBD
 - Visit Alcohol Change UK's website (alcoholchangeuk.org.uk) for access to some comprehensive fact sheets and information

Other considerations

There are many other things to bear in mind as to why ARBD is still relatively unknown and difficult to address:

- There are often other physical and/or mental health conditions present
- It's main symptoms often appear like drunkenness
- There is often shame and stigma around those who are most likely to be affected by ARBD, resulting in less people seeking support
- It can be hard to assess cognitive impairment whilst intoxicated
- It can be difficult to work with someone demonstrating challenging behaviour, as ARBD sufferers often do