

## How am I handling things?

Take a look at your own coping strategies—especially alcohol or other substance use

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Since the U.S. government declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency in March 2020, many of us have continued to conduct our lives in a state of quarantine or semi-quarantine. Many of us have been working remotely, and even for those of us who are conducting business on-site, chances are the look and layout of your position has changed (at least temporarily) due to CDC guidelines and restrictions.

Outside of work, we have had to make adjustments to “the new normal” as well – perhaps changing the way we do our shopping, disrupting family events and vacation plans, and limiting many of our leisure and wellness activities (such as going to the movies or going to the gym).

During such a chaotic and uncertain period, it is understandable that some of us might reach for distractions or comforts that are perhaps not wholly in our best interest. If you are on social media in just about any capacity, you have probably seen memes and tweets about quarantining, feeling isolated, drinking to cope, and other dubious behaviors. While these memes and tweets can be funny, they also prompt us to look at and question our own coping strategies, especially when it comes to alcohol or other substance use.

### How do I know if I have a problem with alcohol or drugs?

We know that at one point Americans were buying more beer and liquor during the Coronavirus pandemic than they did pre-COVID (although this does not necessarily translate to more individuals imbibing more alcohol than usual), and using alcohol as a means to unwind or de-stress is certainly not a new or uncommon practice. But how much is too much? And when should we be concerned with our alcohol (or other drug) use?



If you are experiencing physical problems as a result of your alcohol or drug use – if, for example, your hands tremble upon awakening and you find you need a drink to “steady” yourself, then that is absolutely an indicator of a problem and something for which you should seek medical assistance immediately.

Now, suppose you aren't experiencing that level of impact, but still have concerns about your drinking or drug use – what then? There are two questions you might ask yourself:

1. **How often am I thinking about my drinking or drug use?** Do you think about your drinking as a daily given, like eating food or taking a shower? Have you had conversations with friends or family members about "my drinking" or "my drinking habits"? If your drinking or drug use is beginning to take a central place in your thoughts and/or your daily life, that may indicate a problem and it would be worth exploring further. Remember that your Ulliance Life Advisor EAP is a free and CONFIDENTIAL resource for these and other work/life concerns.
2. **Do I feel bad about my drinking or drug use, and am I continuing to drink or use even though I feel bad about it?** Do you experience emotional consequences as a result of your use? Do you feel bad or unhappy about your use and continue to use (or drink) despite your negative feelings about it? If you find yourself drinking or using despite not really wanting to, then that suggests you may have lost the power of choice and that is another strong indicator of a problem. Any behavior which you would rather not engage in but find yourself engaging in despite your negative feelings about said behavior can be considered problematic.

If you find yourself thinking often about your drinking or drug use, and if you continue to drink or use despite not wanting to, consider reaching out to Ulliance. Our Life Advisor consultants can speak with you further, ask you specific questions, and get you on the right path for you.

### The CAGE assessment

The CAGE Questionnaire is a tool used by counselors to determine if alcohol may be a problem for an individual. CAGE is an acronym, with each letter representing a question:

1. Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
2. Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
3. Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
4. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover (eye-opener)?

If you are a male and answer "yes" to two or more of the CAGE questions, that is considered clinically significant. If you are a female and answer "yes" to one or more of the CAGE questions, that is considered clinically significant. While individuals should never self-diagnose, if in looking at these questions you find yourself ruminating on your own drinking habits either during quarantine or before, it would be a good opportunity to reach out to Ulliance. We have additional assessments we can administer. We have tools and resources we can provide you. And we can develop a plan of action unique to your needs and where you are at right now.

## Community Resources

If you're interested in exploring community support groups, there are a number of resources available, most of which have converted to online/telephonic platforms due to COVID-19.

Alcoholics Anonymous is an international fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem. It is nonprofessional, self-supporting, multiracial, apolitical, and available almost everywhere. There are no age or education requirements. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem. For more information, including links to telephonic and Zoom meetings in your area, visit <https://aa.org/>

SMART Recovery is a mutual support group that emphasizes self-empowerment and a science-based approach to addiction recovery. This organization also has an active online community. According to the SMART Recovery website <http://www.smartrecovery.org/>, SMART Recovery intends to remain fully operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, there is Women for Sobriety, an abstinence-based self-help program for women recovering from alcohol and drug addiction. They host in-person meetings, most of which have converted to online video counseling meetings as a result of COVID-19. For more information about the organization, visit [womenforsobriety.org](http://womenforsobriety.org)

Recovery Dharma is a peer-led organization which supports individuals in recovery through the use of Buddhist practices and principles. They have daily meetings available online during the COVID-19 health crisis. For meetings and additional information, visit [recoverydharma.org](http://recoverydharma.org)

Outside of peer support groups, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – “is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free publications and other information.”

Last but certainly not least, remember your Ulliance Life Advisor Employee Assistance Program. We provide free, short-term, solution-focused counseling services. Our consultants are standing by, ready to listen, and happy to help. The most important words to remember are – you are not alone.



**Ulliance provides no cost, confidential, short term counseling  
for you & your family.**

Call us- we're here to help **800.448.8326**