

Alcohol Misuse

A 2020 study reported that hazardous drinking was found in 25.8% of athletes. Alcohol misuse includes drinking despite impaired function, harm, and alcohol dependence. (1)

Alcohol misuse is preventable and treatable, and early recognition supports both athletic performance and long-term health.

Signs and Symptoms

Behavioural

- Drinking more than intended or difficulty controlling alcohol intake
- Drinking to cope with stress, pressure, poor performances, or emotions
- Binge drinking episodes
- Continued drinking despite negative effects on training, relationships, or health
- Secrecy around alcohol use

Physical/Psychological

- Impaired recovery, poor sleep, or persistent fatigue
- Mood changes, irritability, anxiety, or low mood
- Increased injury risk and slower healing
- Decline in concentration, reaction time, or coordination

What athletes can do

- Recognise signs and symptoms (refer to the SMHRT) and seek help early from a team physician, psychologist and/or licensed mental health provider
- Develop alternative coping strategies for stress, disappointment, or transition periods
- Set clear boundaries around alcohol use, particularly during competition and heavy training blocks
- Recognise that reducing or stopping alcohol use is a performance and health-positive choice, not a weakness

What coaches and support staff can do

- Recognise signs and symptoms (refer to the SMHRT) and promote early help seeking behaviour and support from a team physician, psychologist and/or licensed mental health provider
- Avoid normalising binge drinking or alcohol-centred team culture
- Create environments where choosing not to drink is respected and supported
- Know your National Federation's written mental health referral protocols

Remember:

Alcohol is not required for recovery, relaxation, or team bonding. Reducing alcohol use supports clarity, consistency, and long-term performance.

(1) This factsheet is intended for education and performance support. It does not replace individualised psychological care where needed. IOC Mental Health in Elite Athletes Toolkit, 2021. Other content adapted from NCAA and NAMI.