

Ask people, young and old alike, why they drink alcohol or use other drugs and you're likely to get responses that include (though not limited to) coping with stress.

Thinking about stress, according to BC's [Adolescent Health Survey](#) (2013) most youth across BC (83%) reported feeling at least some stress in the past month. Females were more likely than males to experience extreme stress that prevented them from functioning properly (13% vs. 5%). Of those who reported using alcohol or other drugs, 16% of males and 25% of females cited stress as a reason for using.

All of us experience stress and, while it's not always a bad thing (e.g., starting a new school year, preparing for a trip or a performance), it is important to learn how to manage stress in a healthy way. Drinking alcohol or using other drugs may provide us with temporary relief from stress. But using substances too often as a coping strategy may lead to significant harm.

While everyone copes with stress differently, regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your health and it's also an important part of a stress-busting lifestyle. It can change your mood – so if you are feeling sluggish, some activity can make you feel more energized and alert. But at the same time, it can also help calm agitated, angry or anxious feelings. It can reduce levels of the stress hormones that cause the physical feeling of being stressed (like feeling tense or hyper-aroused) and also results in the release of feel-good brain chemicals.

Why “why?” matters

The reasons we use a drug are important since they influence our pattern of use and risk of harmful consequences. For example, if it is out of curiosity or another fleeting motive, only occasional or experimental use may follow. If the motive is strong and enduring (e.g., relieving chronic stress or other mental health challenges), then more long-lasting and intense substance use may follow. Motives for intense short-term use (e.g., to fit in, have fun or alleviate temporary stress) may result in risky behaviour with high potential for serious harm.

