

Handout: Alcohol, Medication, and Drug Use After Disaster

Some people increase their use of alcohol, prescription medications, or other drugs after a disaster. You may feel that using drugs and alcohol seem to help you escape bad feelings or physical symptoms related to stress responses (for example, headaches, muscle tension). However, they can actually make these things worse in the long term because they interrupt natural sleep cycles, create health problems, interfere with relationships, and create potential dependence on the substance. If your use of alcohol or drugs has increased since the disaster or is causing problems for you, it is important for you to reduce your level of use or seek help in gaining control over your use.

Managing alcohol, medication, and drug use

- Pay attention to any change in your use of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Consult with a healthcare professional about safe ways to reduce anxiety, depression, muscle tension, and sleep difficulties.
- Correctly use prescription and over-the-counter medications as indicated.
- If you find that you have greater difficulty controlling alcohol/substance use since the hurricane, seek support in doing so.
- Eat well, exercise, get enough sleep, and use your family and others for support.
- If you believe you have a problem with substance abuse, talk to your doctor or counselor about it.
- If you feel like using larger amounts of either prescribed or over-the-counter medications, consult a healthcare professional.

If you have had an alcohol, medication, or drug problem in the past

For people who have successfully stopped drinking or using drugs, experiencing a disaster can sometimes result in strong urges to drink or use again. Sometimes it can lead them to strengthen their commitment to recovery. Whatever your experience, it is important to consciously choose to stay in recovery.

- Increase your attendance at substance abuse support groups.
- Talk with family and friends about supporting you to avoid use of alcohol or substances.
- If you are receiving disaster crisis counseling, talk to your counselor about your past alcohol or drug use.
- If you have a 12-Step sponsor or substance abuse counselor, talk to him or her about your situation.
- If you have been forced to move out of your local community, talk to disaster workers about helping to locate nearby alcohol or drug recovery groups, or ask them to help organize a new support group.
- Increase your use of other supports that have helped you avoid relapse in the past