Pandemic-related stress + isolation = increased misuse of alcohol and drugs

When COVID-19 lockdowns began about two years ago, millions of employees quickly transitioned to work from home, often in close proximity with family members, partners and roommates. These new living and working arrangements led to increased levels of stress, anxiety, isolation and depression for many employees. The potential for alcohol and drug abuse spiked — even among those who had never had a substance-abuse problem before.

Studies show that approximately one-third of people in this country who drank alcohol increased their consumption at the start of the pandemic. Similar increases hold true for those who report drug usage. Many of these habits continue today. Of particular concern is the rise of opioid addiction and related deaths. Between April 2020 and April 2021, fatalities related to substance abuse reached a 12-month all-time high — 100,000 people — according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Amid the pandemic, mental health and substance-abuse disorders increased, including using alcohol and recreational drugs during the workday. Working remotely, more employees felt stressed and isolated from coworkers and their social support system. They may have turned to alcohol and drugs to cope. Increased use of drug and alcohol continues to affect the workplace today.

A Self-Medication Nation Survey' sponsored by an addiction treatment center (Sierra Tucson) revealed that:

• 25 percent of respondents had participated in a Zoom or Microsoft Teams work call while under the influence of alcohol, marijuana or other recreational drugs.

• One in five admitted they’ve used alcohol, marijuana or other drugs while employed remotely; 73 percent of those said if their employer would insist they return to the office, they would miss the opportunity to use marijuana and other drugs during the workday.

• More than one-quarter of respondents said an added “benefit” of working from home was the opportunity to use alcohol and other drugs during the workday.


Advocate Aurora EAP: 800-236-3231
Could you or your loved one benefit from professional help? Advocate Aurora EAP is here for you

Remember, your employer has invested in your health and wellbeing. Don’t forget about the mental health and substance abuse assistance Advocate Aurora Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers covered employees. **All EAP services are completely confidential.** Employees can access the help they need without worrying that their employers will know that they have reached out for professional assistance.

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are a great resource to access life-changing resources to address the challenges you may be facing. Trained counselors can help you tackle issues affecting your personal and/or work life. If you or your loved one is struggling with stress, anxiety or substance use, please consider booking an appointment with an Advocate Aurora counselor. EAP services are available at no cost to you and members of your immediate household. EAP assistance is available 24/7.

Newer treatment options remove barriers

In the past, employees may have avoided asking for help because of some perceived stigma associated with mental health and addiction treatment. Newer telehealth treatment options help remove physical barriers to treatment, including finding the time for treatment. Convenient counseling options include telephonic, in-person or virtual telehealth video counseling.

People can seek and receive treatment from the privacy of their home and at different times of the day. This consumer-friendly option reduces a major barrier to seeking help for many employees. If you choose virtual counseling, be sure to have a secure place at home or at work to talk privately. Take the call in a room with a door that can close and use headphones, if necessary, so you can focus on the call — and yourself.

For assistance, please contact Advocate Aurora Employee Assistance Program: 800-236-3231