

Self-medicating.

It's a term people use blithely, when referring to things like an extra glass of wine after a hard day. But for those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), self-medicating can become the difference between life and death, for today at least. A way to cope with a traumatic event, that won't stop playing over and over in their minds.

As those days pile up, addiction can become the inevitable conclusion for the men and women struggling with PTSD.

Both addiction and PTSD are serious mental health issues separately, but combined they are a deadly mixture for many in this country.

So, what can we do?

[Liberation Way](#) is here to help.

### **What is self-medicating?**

Pop media contains a million images of someone talking about being "stressed out" and having a glass of wine or beer or a cocktail to cope. Sometimes they laugh and call it "self-medicating".

The glass of wine is fine, but self-medicating is no laughing matter.

For many people, a glass of wine on a Tuesday night is enough to get them through whatever name their stress wears: overbearing boss, teenagers at home, working at a job that isn't fulfilling but pays the bills.

But for some, self-medicating isn't about just coping with an annoying supervisor.

It's about dealing with some of the harshest things that can happen to you on a personal level:

- Physical and mental abuse
- Sexual assault
- A physical attack
- War

Events like these can cause PTSD, and not everyone can or will get the help they need to deal with these traumatic events.

### **What is PTSD?**

[The National Center for PTSD](#) defines the disorder as a mental health problem that some people develop after witnessing a life-threatening event.

One of the key words in that definition is *some*: not everyone that experiences a traumatic event will develop PTSD, but they don't know why.

That means that two people can be in the same car accident, and only one will develop PTSD.

Two veterans can be involved in the same combat zone firefight - and both will develop PTSD.

Or neither will.

Regardless of why some people suffer from PTSD and others don't, it's real, and has become a real problem in the US.

### **Symptoms of PTSD**

There are four main symptoms that manifest with PTSD. Usually, it begins soon after the event, but may not fully manifest for weeks or months, sometimes *years*, afterward.

But if these symptoms last for more than four weeks, you or a loved one may be suffering from PTSD.

#### *Reliving the event*

If you're constantly reliving the event, and feel like you're going through it all over again, that's a flashback. It's not about just thinking: it *feels* like it's happening to you again.

#### *Avoidance*

You avoid situations or people that may trigger memories of the event. You lose friends, or make different ones that may not be good for you. You may stop leaving the house except for necessities.

*Negative changes in what you believe*

You may feel guilty, or shameful, which can lead to feelings of worthlessness and depression.

*Fight-or-Flight*

Especially for veterans, hyperarousal is a common symptom. You feel jittery or wound up, always on the lookout.

When these symptoms become too much, people look for ways to cope.

### **When an extra glass of wine isn't enough**

When something stressful happens to us, we look for ways to cope. Some positive skills include:

- Exercise
- Supportive friends
- Therapy
- New hobbies

But for some, a new hobby or book isn't enough. It's not turning off their overactive minds, and they turn to alcohol or drugs.

At first, it may be enough to have two drinks instead of one. It allows a less-interrupted night's sleep, or you can watch your favorite show without intrusive thoughts.

### **The cycle begins**

You're already suffering, as the events replay themselves over and over in your mind. You can't sleep, which just makes things worse, and maybe you're jittery.

You're feeling angry, depressed, cut off from those around you.

Two drinks become three. Then four. And then five.

Alcohol or other substances may allow you to temporarily reconnect to those around you, and make you feel what you might think of as "normal".

But as addiction sets its hooks, it may further distance you from friends and family: those that want to help, but no longer know how.

### **When self-medicating becomes addiction**

For a time, using alcohol and/or drugs can seem like it's helping. It's numbing you, pushing those traumatic feelings far enough away that you can cope, at least on a limited basis.

But as your body becomes used to those substances, it may take more and more of them to achieve the same level of numbness.

Now there's likely a different issue, as addiction takes the stage. Those around you may not even realize what triggered it, either. Unaware of the underlying cause, they may be critical of your behavior, unintentionally driving you away.

### **Two issues, one person**

Not everyone with PTSD will use negative coping mechanisms. Some will find the help they need through therapy and other support groups.

But not everyone is that lucky.

- *30% of our nation's veterans don't get the PTSD help they need* because they fear it will impact their career, or they'll be viewed as weak.
- In Vietnam veterans, 60-80% require treatment for both PTSD and addiction.

This [dual diagnosis](#) is essential: treating one without addressing the other isn't enough. Read one woman's story about her [successful treatment](#) for both alcoholism and PTSD, and why it was important to treat both.

**You're not alone: how Liberation Way can help**

At Liberation Way, our goal is to provide the individualized care you need. Our licensed, experienced staff work with you to determine the [best option](#) for you, including:

- Intervention
- Detox programs
- Partial hospitalization
- Intensive outpatient treatment

Speak with a treatment advocate today at 877-636-9322 and get on the road to recovery.