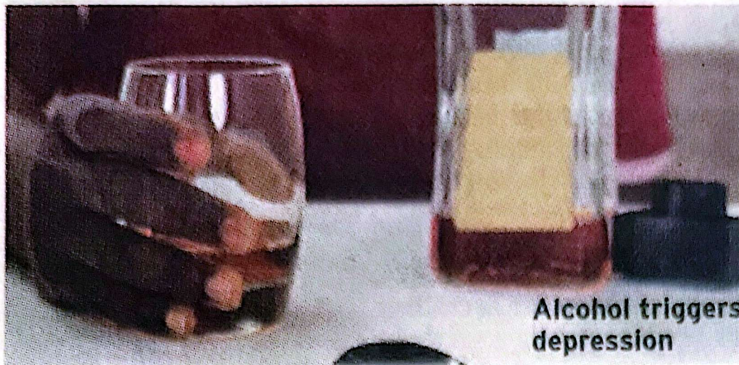


OSCAR BAMUHIGIRE



Can alcohol treat depression?

Q: Dear Counsellor,
I have been sober for some months, but sometimes I get depressed and I feel like drinking because it makes me feel better. Can alcohol treat depression?

Jane, Entebbe

A Dear Jane,
It is good that you have been sober for some months and it is important that you do not lose what you have fought so hard to gain. Sometimes people relapse when they get depressed, because they forget how terrible their lives were when they used to drink. When the temporary relief that comes with taking a few drinks fades away, they sink into a deeper depression, regretting why they drank again.

Alcohol can treat depression and that is why most alcoholics take to drinking the way they do. To them, it is a form of self-medication, but over time, it worsens their condition. In reality, alcohol only treats depression for those who are capable of taking it in moderation and who are not already suffering from depression. That is according to a 2013 study published in the journal *BMC Medicine*. The researchers found that those who take two to seven small glasses of wine a week are 32% less likely to suffer from depression compared to those who do not drink.

But this, they said, does not apply to those who drink to mask depressive symptoms or to cope with their personal problems, which is exactly what alcoholics do. This kind of drinking, they explained, would instead trigger a depressive episode. They defined moderate drinking as taking five to 15 grammes of alcohol a day (a small glass of wine contains about nine grammes of pure alcohol). According to the researchers, one of the compounds found in grapes may protect the brain from inflammatory processes involved in depression.

A more recent study found that taking large amounts of alcohol had the same effect as taking rapid antidepressants! According to this 2016 study published in the journal *Nature Communications*, this is why those who suffer from major depression are twice as likely to become alcoholics as a result of self-medication.

The solution for your depressive symptoms, therefore, is not resorting to drinking, since that can only make things worse, but in treating the depression that you suffer from.

Some of the effective remedies for depression include joining a self-help group like Alcoholics Anonymous, solving your personal problems, seeing a counsellor who can help you to change the way you think and sometimes even taking anti-depressants.

**Oscar has about 20 years of continuous sobriety
and 18 years experience as an addiction counsellor**