

Childhood trauma is common and damaging. Anyone can experience trauma as a child, but [women are particularly vulnerable to the mental health consequences](#), like post-traumatic stress disorder. The repercussions of trauma are varied and extensive and often include substance abuse. Some women binge drink to forget and cope, but this destructive behavior only makes the situation worse. Treatment that focuses on past trauma can provide relief and an end to the cycle of painful memories and binge drinking.

I Was Binge Drinking to Mask the Pain of My Childhood Trauma

I grew up in a difficult home environment. My mom struggled with depression and was often emotionally absent. My father drank too much. I spent a lot of time alone, while my mom slept and my dad was at the bar. He got abusive too, when he came home—not every time but often enough. As an adult I tried to forget my past. I even distanced myself from my family.

But the repercussions of that trauma seeped out in unexpected ways, eventually through excessive drinking, which started to damage my physical and mental health. It was when I finally faced the trauma of my childhood that I learned to move on and to make better, healthier choices. Treatment was key, and I know it can help other women as well.

How Trauma Impacted my Adult Life

The [effects of childhood trauma are far-reaching](#). I thought I could forget it and move on with my life, but it proved to be much more complicated. Now, having been through trauma-focused treatment, I have a better understanding of how it really impacted every area of my life, from my behaviors and choices to my relationships and even finances.

I have struggled with anxiety since high school, and I now connect that back to my childhood. I felt insecure in a household with abuse and neglect. I worried about everything because I had so little control and was not being cared for properly.

In addition to a now-diagnosed anxiety disorder, thinking about my past makes me feel ashamed, scared, and sad. I developed a habit of binge drinking to cope with these feelings that went unaddressed for so long. My relationship with my husband is often volatile. I get needy and worry he'll leave me, with no evidence that he will, only because I feel insecure. All of these things, I believe, are triggered by my traumatic childhood.

Trying to Forget the Past—and Failing

I thought that if I could just forget the past, that it would let me go. But this is a false hope. Thinking about the neglect of my parents and the occasional verbal abuse from my dad, it hurt. I felt cheated. So I tried to just ignore those memories.

It didn't work. When I tried to push the memories back, the effects of those terrible times just came out in different ways. It might be a fight with my husband, a depressed mood, an anxiety attack, or excessive stress. It also eventually led to a bad drinking habit.

Not Processing Trauma Led to Dangerous Drinking

Only later, I learned that [excessive drinking is a typical reaction to trauma](#), especially in women. For me it started with stress. Any time my stress level is elevated, painful memories about my childhood start to

sneak in, no matter how hard I try to ignore them. What I found could really drown out those thoughts was alcohol. If I drank enough, the memories faded to the background.

As stress at work started to accelerate, I drank at night. When my husband got really sick and nearly lost his life, I drank more. It started out as just a glass or two of wine and turned into binges. I didn't drink all the time; sometimes I even went a week or two without a drop. But when I felt really stressed out, the only thing that kept the memories away was to binge drink.

Drinking Made Things Worse

While drinking helped me feel better in the moment, it created major problems. A hangover was the least of these but still an issue. I kept waking up with a pounding headache, and I had to call in sick to work more than once. I nearly lost my job because of so much lost time.

Drinking also triggered nightmares. In those dreams, my dad was coming home from the bar and I froze in fear. I would wake up drenched in sweat and terrified. All the next day, I tried to forget it. And that led to more drinking. It was a terrible cycle.

Why I Finally Decided to Get Treatment

It took an effort from my husband and my best friend to convince me that I needed professional support. They were the only two people I had ever talked to about my childhood, and I think they eventually put the pieces together, seeing that my drinking was a way I masked the pain.

After my husband recovered from his illness, I found I had no more excuses to drink to the point of blacking out. Of course that wasn't a valid excuse, but it was one I used to claim I needed alcohol to manage the stress and worry. I stopped drinking for a few weeks, but the memories of my past kept sneaking back in.

When I almost got fired but my boss gave me another chance, my friend and husband got together and asked me to consider therapy. I consider it a light bulb moment. I saw what they saw and that my memories were overwhelming me. I needed help that alcohol couldn't provide.

Residential Treatment Helped Me Turn a Corner

I don't like to do things halfway, and when I told my husband I thought residential treatment for a few months would be best, he agreed. It was scary to pack my bags and leave home for that long, but I also felt relief knowing I was doing something positive.

The first day in treatment, my psychiatrist told me I didn't have a serious alcohol use disorder, which was a relief. I didn't meet the criteria, yet, but I was headed down that path. I knew that meant I could change my behaviors more easily.

My treatment plan centered on trauma-focused therapy. I worked with a therapist most days, and at first it was so hard to purposely relive those memories. But the more I did so in an environment that felt safe, the easier it got.

My therapist also helped me practice strategies for stress relief, since that proved to be such a big trigger for drinking. I didn't even realize that was my trigger until she helped me figure it out. I learned

important ways to manage all of my negative feelings and to avoid using destructive, impulsive behaviors as a poor coping mechanism.

Another great thing about residential care was that I had so much support from the other women there. Most of them had also experienced trauma, and while we all had different outcomes, we had that in common. The sense of sharing with these women, the ability to support each other, and the camaraderie were so healing.

Working Toward a Better Life

After three months in treatment, I felt strong and determined. I was intimidated by the thought of going back to the so-called real world, but I was prepared. What treatment did for me was make me ready to take control of my past and my current life.

Those old memories will never go away, but they no longer run my life. I have bad days still, but I mostly have good days and I keep working on healing. I drink occasionally but haven't binged in more than a year. My relationships are stronger, and I'm enjoying life more than I have in a long time.