

Tips for cutting down and stopping

What are my goals?

Set a goal

When hoping or planning to change one's drinking the first step is setting a goal. A good goal provides a challenge, while at the same time is, obtainable and realistic. The more concrete the better. Beforehand think through what your aims are and express them in exact detail. Keep in mind "baby steps"! It took you years to establish your current drinking habits, changing them completely is not going to happen over night. A good goal is oftentimes reached step by step.

Your first step

You need to make a decision. Do you cut down your drinking or stop it completely? For those who are cutting down it's best to take a break from all drinking for a week or two in the beginning. This provides you a clean slate with which to start your new way of drinking.

Some personal goal suggestions

If you are trying to stop drinking altogether, it is important to set a definite quit date.

If your goal is to reduce your drinking, it will help if you plan on which days you will drink alcohol and how many drinks you will have on each of these days. Make sure you have at least two alcohol-free days a week.

It helps to record the number of drinks that you have each day e.g. in the format shown below. Keeping a record will remind you to cut down and it will help you to keep track whether you are following your goals. Check out the Drinking Diary for more about this.

My Drinking Goal		
I will start on this day	xx.xx.xxxx	
I will not drink more than	x	standard drinks in one day
I will not drink more than	x	standard drinks in one week
OR		
I will stop drinking alcohol	xx.xx.xxxx	

Tips for cutting down

Keep in mind

There are small things you can do in your everyday life that can make a large impact on your current drinking situation.

Check your home front

Do you have a lot of alcohol around the house? Keeping a small amount or no alcohol at home leads to less temptation in your living environment.

Reposition the way you drink

Quenching your thirst with non-alcoholic drinks before having an alcoholic one slows the rate at which you drink. Try to take small sips of your drink and avoid gulping. When you're out, have one or more non-alcoholic drink between each alcoholic one. Or when you are out, check around the table at how fast other people are drinking. Find the slowest drinkers and use them as a personal gauge, trying to finish your drink at the same time as they do.

Eat before drinking

This will make you feel more full which can in turn will help you to drink less. Avoid salty snacks when you are drinking, as these will make you thirsty.

Dilute your drinks

For example add soda to wine and mixers to spirits. Be creative!

Remember to pace yourself

Taking a break of one hour between drinks gives your system time to adjust to the alcohol thus making it less of a strain on your system.

Tips for stopping

For those who wish to stop or avoid drinking

Take a break from alcohol

First, pick a day or two each week when you will not drink at all. Then, try to stop drinking for one week. Think about how you feel physically and emotionally on these days. After you complete this small test, you may find it easier to cut down or quit for good and then feel better about your new drinking style.

Learn how to say NO

You don't have to drink when others are drinking, even if a drink is given to you. It's not rude to decline. Practice ways to say 'no' politely. You don't need to explain yourself. Stay away from people who give you hard time about not drinking. If your change in lifestyle doesn't agree with them, you might want to rethink the friendship.

Stay active

There are many new activities waiting for you to spend the time previously devoted to drinking in other ways. Use the extra time and money previously spent on drinking to do something fun with your family or friends. Go out to eat, see a film, take up a sport or just sit with a good book under a tree. Take advantage of this valuable extra free time!

Get support

Cutting down on your drinking or quitting may prove difficult at times. Ask your family and friends for support to help you reach your goal. Talk to your doctor if you are having trouble cutting down or quitting. It's important to reach out for the extra help you need. You might be surprised at all the support structures you already have in place in your family, network of friends and community.

Watch out for temptations

Watch out for people, places or times that in the past encouraged you to drink. This is all part of rethinking your habits of socialising. Stay away from people who drink a lot and steer clear of bars you used to frequent. Plan ahead for times of temptation, creating a plan of attack for those difficult moments. Do not drink when you are angry, upset or having a bad day. This pattern of drinking can be hard to break.

Review your social scene

Identify what changes need to be made in your routines.

- If you are in the habit of going to pubs after work or meeting your friends at bars try to organise different social activities, for example go see a film, or to the gym for a work-out or a game of basket ball.
- If you drink mainly at night try to keep yourself busy going to places where you cannot drink, for example the movies.
- If you tend to drink when you are alone get involved in more social activities, for example join a club or increase family time.
- If you tend to drink when you are bored try to plan enjoyable activities, for example shows, movies, exercise, hobbies and so on. Life is full of options.
- If you tend to drink when you are stressed learn relaxation techniques or engage in relaxing activities, for example gardening, yoga, exercise, etc.
- If you drink when you feel depressed or if you think that drinking calms your nerves you should consult your doctor about it. It's important to contact professionals in your community who can help you.

Keep on trying

Don't give up

Most people do not cut down or give up drinking all at once. Keep in mind it took many years for you to get to where you are – it's going to take some time for you to change your habit of a life time. At times you might find it difficult to stick to your goals. You may find you ended up drinking more than you were initially planning.

Do not get discouraged

If you fail to meet your goal, it's merely a minor setback, something to learn from. It's part of life to make mistakes, but acknowledge them, think about what lessons you can learn and move on. Keep on trying and don't give up. Think of all the progress you've already achieved.

Things to remember

Don't give up because of a bad experience. Take one day at a time and gradually it will get easier. It's good to create your own support team, look to your family, friends and other people within your community.

Each time you stop a past habit, you're one step closer to breaking that habit completely. The craving for alcohol will go if you mentally occupy yourself with something else. Talk to your doctor and/or counsellor concerning any difficulties, especially if you are experiencing problems with your physical/mental health which have started since you stopped drinking.

If this isn't working

If you are having real difficulty reaching your goal it's time to step back and re-evaluate. It's important that you ask yourself 'why is this not working?' 'What went wrong?' Be honest with yourself. Answering these questions can help you formulate a new "plan of attack". Your new plan may often be much better as it has been thought through in more detail.

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