



## Alcohol use

Did you know that according to the current National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia, to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury healthy adults should limit their consumption of alcohol to:

- No more than ten standard drinks per week
- No more than four standard drinks on any one day

Having a beer or a glass of wine can be a nice way to bond with friends and colleagues. However, alcohol use becomes a problem when it becomes part of how you function every day, or if it is used as a way to cope with painful emotions and stress.

### How do I know when my drinking has become a problem?

It can be hard to see that drinking has become a problem, particularly when the people around you drink alcohol, or when drinking is a big part of how you socialise or relax. Consider the following questions about your use of alcohol, and its impact on your life:

- Do you regularly consume more than the recommended amount of alcohol?
- Are you unable to stop drinking once you have started, or find you often drink more than you intended?
- Have you been unable to meet your commitments due to drinking, for example, not going to work or not being able to look after your children?
- Have your friends, colleagues, or family expressed concerns about your drinking?
- Are you relying on alcohol to manage other aspects of your life, such as your stress, your sleep, or your emotions?

If you answered 'Yes' to any of these questions, it is advised that you actively try to reduce your intake.

### How can I manage my drinking?

#### Track your alcohol consumption:

Being aware of how much alcohol you drink, and understanding when and why you drink, is the first step in making a plan to reduce your consumption.

The easiest way to track your alcohol consumption is via a mobile app. You can record what you drink, how much you drink, and other things such as where you were, who was around you, and how you were feeling.

After a week or two, look back at the pattern of your drinking:

- What situations are triggers for you?
- Who are you most often around when you're drinking?
- If you are drinking too much, what is the reason for this? There are many reasons for drinking to excess, and understanding why you are drinking is just as important as knowing how much you are drinking. It can be hard to cut down if you are relying on alcohol to manage your anxiety, to get to sleep, or to cope with difficult emotions or unwanted thoughts.

**Plan ahead:**

Once you understand your triggers, you can make a plan for how to manage your drinking in high risk situations.

When you're faced with a situation where you're more likely to drink - or drink to excess — decide in advance what number of drinks will be your limit, and make a commitment to yourself that you will stay within that limit.

- Make sure that the limit that you set is reasonable. Initially at least, you may prefer to avoid situations where you don't feel confident that you'll be able to stick to your limit, or where you know that you'll feel pressured to drink more than you intend to. Alternatively, you might limit your time in the situation - plan to leave early, or schedule another commitment.
- If you plan to drink alcohol, but only in moderation, space out your alcoholic drinks. E.g. Make every second drink a non-alcoholic drink, or plan to have an alcoholic drink only at certain times during the night.
- If you plan not to drink at all, decide in advance what you will drink instead.
- Buy your own drinks. Relying on others to buy you a non-alcoholic beverage, or taking part in 'rounds', may result in you losing track of your intake.
- Practice saying no in a calm and confident way before you go out so it's easier to do when you're in the moment.
- If you tend to drink alone, limit your access to alcohol. Don't keep alcohol in the house, and actively avoid places where you may be likely to buy alcohol.
- Tell someone you trust that you're trying to cut back, or not drink at all, and let them know how they can support you to do this.

**Practice Delay, Distract, Decide:**

Delay drinking within an achievable timeframe (5, 10, 15 or 30 minutes). Gradually increase your delay periods. This teaches your brain that you don't have to act on impulses that will eventually pass.

Distract yourself from drinking. Walk, read, talk to a friend or watch a movie. Have a list of activities that you can do when the urge to drink comes up.

Decide after the end of the set period of time why reducing your drinking is important to you. How will it help you to be the kind of person you want to be, and have the life you want to live?

Consider other ways to unwind and let go of tension, such as meditation, yoga, mindfulness or swimming. Remember to take care of yourself: eat a healthy diet, have a structured sleep routine, maintain positive social relationships and exercise regularly. By doing this, you'll set yourself a strong foundation to build your resilience.

**When to seek help?**

If you are concerned that you are drinking above the recommended level, how you manage your behaviour around alcohol or need support reducing your alcohol intake, a healthcare professional can help you achieve your goals.

You may want to discuss the best option with your GP. Alternatively, if you find that you are relying on alcohol to manage difficult emotions, or to aid your sleep, you may like to speak about these underlying issues with a mental health professional.



**Alcohol and Drug  
Information Services VIC**  
1800 888 236



**Turning Point**  
[www.turningpoint.org.au](http://www.turningpoint.org.au)



**Police Wellbeing Services**  
1300 090 995