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How to drink less over Christmas and the New Year

Whether you're going to parties with friends or colleagues, it's easy to overdo it with alcohol over Christmas and the New Year. So how can you manage your drinking over the festive period?

Many of us overindulge at Christmas. We meet friends at the pub, crack open the wine with family, and make the most of free fizz with our colleagues at work parties. And although we all drink too much from time to time – and regret it when we're suffering with a hangover – it's easy to fall into the habit of unhealthy drinking.

How drinking too much affects your health

Drinking too much can lead to serious health consequences, both mental and physical.

"In the short term, alcohol can affect your sleep and your weight, and impair your judgement. Alcohol is the second biggest risk factor for developing [cancer](#), after [smoking](#)," says Jennifer Walters, a spokesperson at [Drinkaware](#).

"So longer term, drinking above the low-risk guidelines increases your risk of seven types of cancer, including [breast](#), [liver](#) and [mouth](#) cancer. Other effects include raised [blood pressure](#), [liver disease](#), brain damage and mental health problems."

Stephen Buckley, head of information at the mental health charity [Mind](#), adds: "Many of us drink more than usual at Christmas, and while for most it's not a huge problem, becoming dependent on alcohol can affect your [mental health](#) and may cause difficulty thinking clearly or problem solving or with having feelings of [anxiety](#)."

This is because alcohol is a depressant and regularly drinking too much disrupts the balance of chemicals in our brain that affect mood.

"Drinking heavily and regularly is associated with symptoms of [depression](#), although it can be difficult to separate cause and effect," Walters says. "Reducing or stopping drinking can improve mood. To look after our mental health, reducing how much we drink is an important first step."

Although feeling anxious or sad when you're hungover is very different to experiencing depression – which is marked by long-term feelings of sadness or despair – it can still be unpleasant. Managing how much you drink on a night out can help you avoid hangovers and the accompanied feelings of anxiety or low mood.

How to cut down your drinking over Christmas

Cutting down your intake of alcohol isn't always easy, but there are steps you can take to cut down.

The Chief Medical Officers' guidelines for both men and women are to drink no more than 14 units a week, which is around six medium glasses of wine or six pints of beer. If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread your drinking evenly over three or more days.

Know your triggers

Understanding why you drink can help you manage your drinking. People, places, times and emotions like feeling sad or happy can also be linked to drinking alcohol.

"Think about what your own personal triggers to drink alcohol are and how you can change your behaviour to fit your lifestyle," Walters advises. "It might help to talk to someone about it – a friend, your GP or anonymously with a trained professional over the phone.

"To succeed in reducing your drinking you may need to break associations. For example, if you tend to reach for a drink when you come home from work – or stop work if you're working from home – plan an alternative activity to try to break this link. You could go for a walk or read your favourite book instead."

Avoid 'all or nothing' thinking

If you've cut back on your drinking and you've been doing well, it's easy to feel you've blown it completely if you slip up. However, it's important to avoid this 'all or nothing' thinking.

"Remember this is all about moderation to be kind to yourself and get back on track as soon as possible," says Walters. "Reducing your drinking is a marathon, not a sprint, so take it day by day. Focusing on one day at a time will help the journey feel more manageable."

Get support

Telling your friends and family about your goals over Christmas can help them understand why you may turn down drinks, or perhaps taking up new activities in place of drinking. Getting their support can also help you stick to your goals.

"But there are times when friends and family might not be as supportive as you'd like and they may not even realise it," says Walters. "If this is the case, remind yourself of your 'why' and that you alone are in control of your decisions."

It's also important to remember the festive season can be very hard for some people, especially those who are isolated. "If you're worried about your own drinking or someone else's, it's more important than ever that you stay connected to people by phone or video calls to seek or offer support and strength by talking to someone," adds Walters.

You can do this anonymously in online groups, with trained advisors and counsellors or with friends or family. Organisations including [Drinkaware](#), [AA](#) and the [Alcohol Health Alliance](#) offer advice, support and resources.

It can help to speak with your doctor if you think you have a problem with alcohol. They can provide advice on the best course of action for you.

Be prepared

Here are some tips to help you drink less over Christmas:

- There are apps you can download to help keep track of how much alcohol you are drinking, such as the **Drinkaware app**.
- If you are planning to see family or friends, try to come up with activities at home that don't necessarily involve drinking – for example, a games night.
- If other people will be **drinking**, stock up on alcohol-free options.
- It's easy to underestimate the amount you're drinking, especially if you're drinking spirits at home – what you assume is a single measure could easily be two or three. Use a drink measure to keep tabs on the number of units you're drinking.

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