

How to Cut Down on Drinking

You might want to cut down on your drinking for many reasons. Unfortunately, the best of intentions don't necessarily make the effort any easier.

"Alcohol is a powerful drug, even if it is legal," says Joseph D. Beasley, M.D., author of *How to Defeat Alcoholism*. "If you are going to use it, you should use it wisely and in moderation. And if you are one of the 10 to 15% of the population with alcoholism in your family, you should be careful not to drink too much or too often, or not to drink at all."

Understand Why You Drink

While alcohol may be relaxing and enjoyable in small doses, drinking it is not harmless recreation. The substance should be treated with respect.

It helps to understand why and when you drink if you are going to successfully reduce the amount of alcohol you consume. Your answers to the following questions may help bring your motives for drinking into focus.

What is my mood when I drink too much? Am I nervous or anxious, angry, depressed or lonely?

- Am I pressured to have another drink after I decide to stop?
- Do I rationalize my drinking?
- Do I drink as a reward for a tough day?
- Do I drink to fit in or be more comfortable in a social situation?

Social occasions don't usually happen just so people can get together and drink. They exist for other reasons, and no one is counting your drinks. If you are being pressured to drink by others when you don't want to, consider this: If they don't accept your decision, that's their problem. Most people will understand your choice and even respect you for your determination.

Cut-Back Benefits

Reducing your drinking is a win-win situation. Whatever you think you may be giving up, you'll gain much more. Your health will benefit enormously. The calories you'll save may help you lose some extra weight. And you'll reduce your risk of the many health problems associated with alcohol use. You'll also find that in social situations you can have just as much fun, maybe even more, without the crutch of liquor. Plus, you'll save money and lead a more productive life.

What You Can Do

The best way to cut down on drinking is to have a plan for each situation in which you might drink too much. Establish a clear idea of how much you want to drink and how you will handle things once you've reached your limit. It helps to give yourself a time limit for staying at social functions.

Some specific suggestions on ways you can reduce your alcohol consumption include:

- Always stick to your limit.
- Don't drink alone.
- Drink slowly; don't gulp your beverage; and don't drink on an empty stomach.
- Don't drink every day.
- Add water or soda water to your drink to extend it without adding more alcohol.
- Don't start drinking the moment you arrive home or at an event. Wait awhile.
- Change your routine. For instance, if you normally have a drink at home after work, eat dinner or work out instead. Plan other activities to occupy your time.

Remember that Southwest EAP is here to help you and your household. If you or a loved one is experiencing problems with substances please feel free to reach out and see how Southwest EAP can help. Contact us confidentially anytime.