

Top Tips for Managing Drinking

Commit to Change

Change is hard so you need to be clear on *why* you want to change before you start to think about the how. Write out your reasons for wanting to change. Think about how drinking affects your health, your relationships, your work, your family, your self-esteem, and weigh up whether working towards change is worth it.

Identify Triggers

The first step in managing drinking is identifying your drinking habits and triggers. Keep a drinking diary and record how much you drink and when. Also make a note of your thoughts, feelings, and activities in the hours leading up to drinking.

Common triggers are: the time of day; feeling upset, lonely, or bored; work stress; having an argument with someone close to you; or others around you drinking. Once you know your triggers you can start to work towards eliminating them.

Set Realistic Drinking Goals

It's important to set realistic goals. Setting unrealistic goals sets you up for failure, which lessens your belief in your ability to change and makes future change seem even more overwhelming.

Use your drinking diary to establish how much you're drinking each day. Avoid guess work because you can't set realistic goals unless you have an accurate start point. Each week set a realistic drinking goal. For example, if you're drinking 4 beers a night every night you might pick 4 nights and limit yourself to 3 beers on these nights. If you're successful, you might then limit yourself to 3 beers the following week.

Make Yourself Accountable

If you're serious about change, make yourself accountable. Tell a close friend or family member about your weekly goals. Knowing someone knows about your goals can help you stick to them.

Know Your Loopholes

You'll probably have weeks where you don't meet your goals 100%, it's ok. Learn from your experiences. If you drink more than you intended to reflect on how you rationalised this at the time. Knowing your drinking loopholes will help you to not fall for them next time.

Manage Urges

Urges might feel like they're going to hang around for forever, but they won't. If you're having an urge to drink practice waiting the urge out; see if you can delay acting on your urge by 15-minutes. If at the end of 15-minutes it feels like you can wait another 15-minutes, wait another 15-minutes. While you're waiting, do something to distract yourself.

PROBLEM DRINKING

Drinking is such a big part of so many social activities that it can be hard to distinguish between "normal" levels of drinking and problem drinking.

Problem drinking is drinking that:

- **Interferes with your responsibilities at home or work**
- **Occurs in hazardous situations**
- **Causes legal problems**
- **Continues despite the problems it causes in personal relationships**
- **Is used to cope with stress**

Over the long-term it can:

- **Cause serious health problems**
- **Affect employment**
- **Lead to financial problems**
- **Strain personal relationships**

If your drinking is a problem you're not alone. Problem drinking can affect anyone – CEO's, teachers, architects, lawyers, small business owners – and nearly 15% of Australian adults report that they drink alcohol at a high or risky level.

This tips sheet covers basic strategies for managing problem drinking. Try implementing them, but if your drinking is long standing or if you're finding it hard to stop, speak to your GP about a referral to a clinical psychologist. Make sure the clinical psychologist you see has experience in the area of problem drinking