

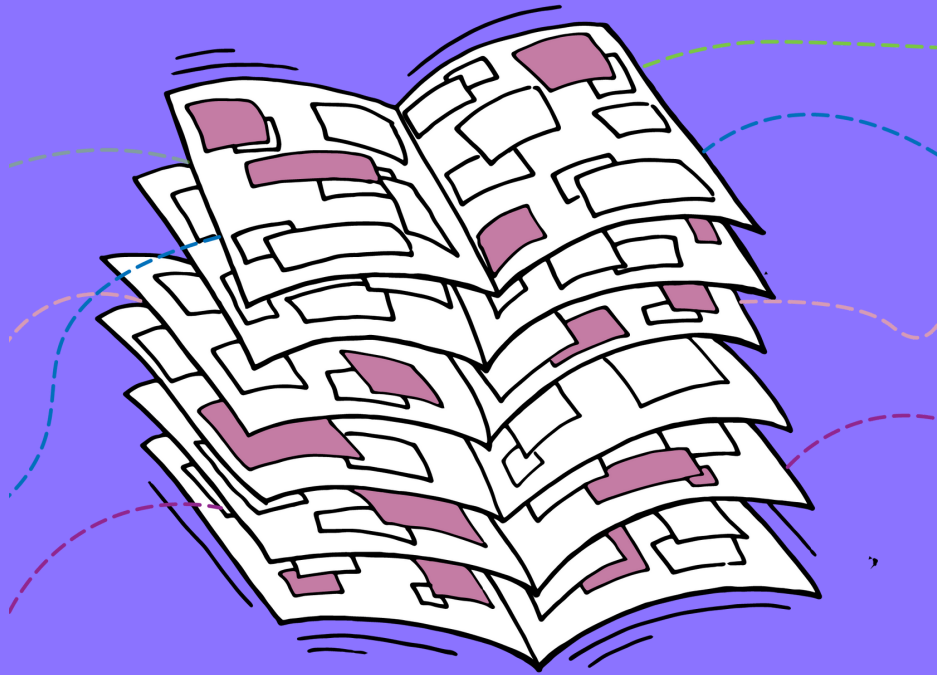
**UNITY
PROJECT:**

**STRATEGIES
FOR REDUCING
ALCOHOL
CONSUMPTION**

Unity Project | Strategies for Reducing Alcohol Consumption



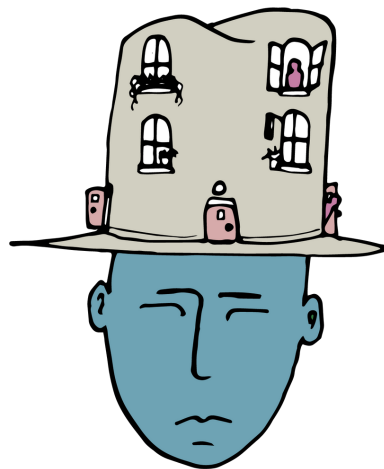
Table of Contents



INTRODUCTION PAGE 1 | MOTIVATION PAGE 2
| UNDERSTANDING YOUR DRINKING HABITS
PAGE 3 | PRACTICAL STRATEGIES PAGE 6

Introduction

ON YOUR FIRST VISIT WE EXPLORED YOUR REASONS FOR WANTING TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY AND TO REDUCE YOUR DRINKING. THIS BOOKLET WILL HELP YOU REFLECT ON THESE REASONS AND OFFER SOME SIMPLE, BUT EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU REDUCE YOUR DRINKING. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO GRAB A PEN AND PAPER TO NOTE DOWN THINGS AS WE GO ALONG.



Motivation

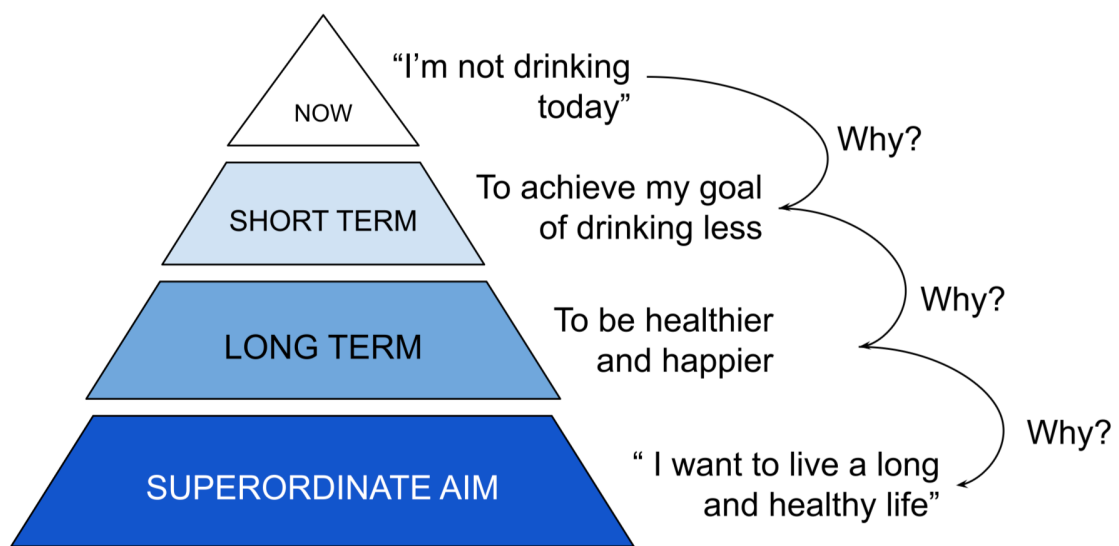
Firstly, deciding on good reasons for changing a habit will help you to succeed. Motivation is important but short-term motivation cannot be relied on alone, as it will go up and down. Rather, you should have clear reasons to reduce or avoid drinking that you can remind yourself of when you're questioning why you should not have a drink. This may be something that you discussed in your visit 1 interview. Some examples of good reasons to reduce your drinking are outlined in the table here. Which of these resonate most with you? Pick a few which are most important to you and write them down. They are useful reminders of why you are cutting down, when you need them.

TABLE 1: LIST OF POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF CUTTING DOWN ON DRINKING. CHOOSE THOSE THAT FEEL MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WRITE THEM DOWN AS MOTIVATIONS TO REDUCE YOUR DRINKING. WHEN YOU QUESTION 'WHY' YOU'RE DOING THIS, REMIND YOURSELF OF THESE REASONS.

Physical	Psychological	Practical
Reduced risk of cancer	Reduced risk of addiction	More money to spend on other activities or save up
Reduce risk of heart disease	Feeling better in the mornings	More time to spend on other activities and with friends/family
Reduced risk of brain disease	Better concentration throughout the day	More able to get work done
Reduced risk of liver disease	Sense of achievement	
Improved sleep	No feeling 'hungover'	
More energy in the mornings	No post-drinking anxiety, feelings of guilt or remorse	
Preventing weight gain		
Reducing high blood pressure		
Improved skin		
Improved digestion		
Better cardiovascular fitness		

Goal-setting research has shown that linking shorter-term goals (e.g. 'not going out drinking today') to longer-term goals that are important to you (e.g. 'Feeling in control of my life and decisions') helps people achieve and stick to their new goals. A good way to understand your underlying motivation is to ask 'Why?' three times. Eventually, your reasons say something about your core values and the way you want to live your life. These are 'superordinate aims' and underlie your short and medium-term decisions. If you are struggling, it can be useful to remind yourself why this matters to you.

An example is given below:



Understanding your drinking habits

NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR DRINKING, THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT, MOST PROBABLY BECAUSE YOU ARE IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU WOULD NORMALLY DRINK.

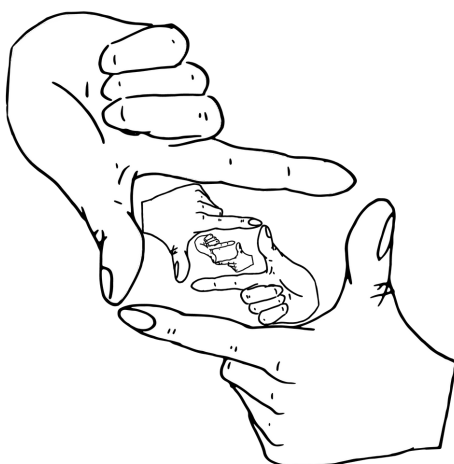
When and where do you normally drink? Do you always have a drink at home after work? Or do you go out to the pub a lot?

Are there particular people who encourage you to drink more than you'd like? Or with whom you end up drinking more?

Are there particular emotions that lead you to drink too much? Do you drink when you're stressed? Or to celebrate? Or to reward yourself for having worked hard? Do you drink when you're nervous in a new situation or meeting new people?

So now, stop and think about the last few times you were drinking too much. Write down your answers to the questions above.

You now have a list of times when you are most likely to drink. Now you have to work out how to deal with those difficult situations – without a drink in your hand. Below are some strategies that may be particularly suited to helping you, depending on your typical drinking patterns.



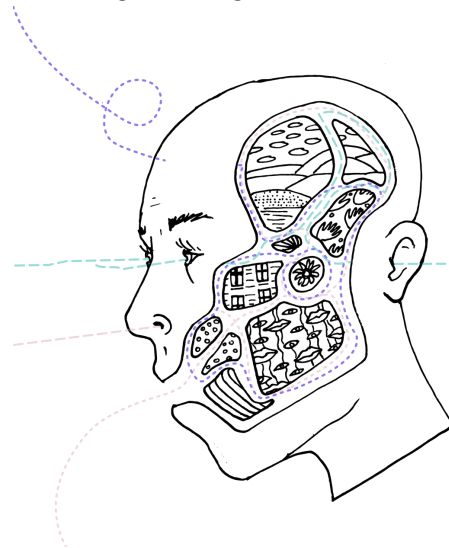
Practical Strategies

As with any new challenge, you don't want to begin completely unprepared. It's important to have some practical strategies that can help you cut back on your drinking. These help you 'stack the deck' in your favour and overcome barriers to cutting down.

Choose drink free days: If you drink most days, decide on and stick to 'drink free days'. A good strategy is to choose only 1 or 2 days per week when you drink. This can help overcome the frequent drinking that adds up to a lot of alcohol over a week. If anyone invites you for a drink on a 'drink-free day', decline the invite or only drink soft drinks. If you're drinking at home, only do it on your drinking days.

Learn to say no to unscheduled drinking sessions: If you end up drinking more often than you want because you are frequently invited to social events, remember it is okay to say no. You are not going to 'miss out' and your friends will not think less of you for declining. You'll save money and feel better the next day. Alternatively, if the aim is to socialise, suggest a different activity e.g. going for a walk or to a cafe instead – or offer to be designated driver. If you do end up going to a pub, choose to have a non-alcoholic drink instead of an alcoholic drink.

Be mindful of cravings: Accept that cravings will happen every now and then, but don't try to fight or avoid these. Know that it's okay to feel like drinking but that if you sit with that feeling, without trying to change it or avoid it, it will eventually pass.



Strategies for when you are drinking

When you do end up drinking, it's important to avoid drinking more than you intended. Set a hard limit on the number of alcoholic drinks you will have and/or a time by which you will leave. Stick to these limits by alternating alcoholic and non-alcohol drinks.

Avoid drinking in 'rounds'.

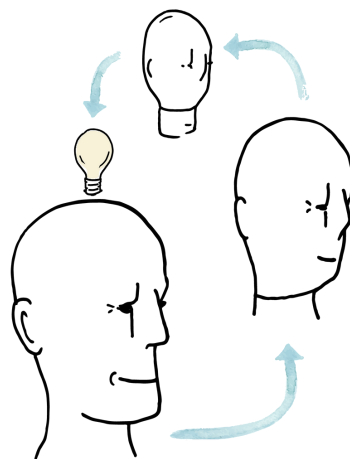
This means people end up drinking at the pace of the fastest drinker and consuming more overall. Buy your own drinks so you're in control of the pace you drink.

Try not to drink mindlessly.

If you are constantly swigging a drink without thinking about it; it is easy to consume more than you intend. Try putting your glass down between each sip or alternating the hand you hold your glass in. This is a subtle way to bring your attention to your drink and notice how fast you are drinking. Try and stick to drinks you can drink more slowly. Many people tend to drink sweet mixed drinks faster. Try switching to unsweetened mixers like soda water. These do not mask the flavour of the alcohol and may help you avoid drinking too fast.

Enjoy other activities.

When changing a habit like drinking, it's important you include other rewarding activities in its place. If relaxation is the main reason you drink, instead of reaching for a drink; try other ways of winding down. You can try mindfulness meditation with free online resources; play sport, have a bath, listen to music, cook a nice meal, go for a walk or bike ride, watch a movie or read books. Just make sure it's something you know you enjoy.



Make accessing alcohol harder.

Around the home you may consider ensuring that the fridge or counter is clear of alcohol or move wine glasses away from the rest of your glasses. If it's too easy to reach for a drink at home, make a plan to not keep alcohol in the house. This means you'll have to go to a shop to buy alcohol, which many times will be enough to stop you drinking. These small 'access barriers' can help set you up for success. If you must keep alcohol in the house; keep it out of sight and somewhere harder to access (such as in a cupboard), rather than somewhere easily accessible.

Get friends/family on board.

If you let your friends know you are trying to cut down, they will be more supportive and question your motives for saying no to invites less. People often find it easier to change a habit if they have someone to help them. This person could be your husband/wife/partner, a friend or colleague who also wants to change their habits. Your support person should be someone you can talk to easily, be honest with, and can ask for advice when you need it. They can also provide some accountability, which is very motivating when trying to develop a new habit.

Create a 'non-drinking' habit.

Drinking alcohol is an enjoyable part of many people's lives – a habit they'd feel lost without. Determine a clear goal for the level of drinking you want to achieve: Do you want to stop completely? Or reduce the number of days you drink? Or Reduce your drinking to within guideline amounts?

Whatever you are changing to, think of it as creating a new, positive habit of drinking with control. Much like learning an instrument, playing a sport or exercising, you have to learn and train this skill to get better at it. The more you practice the easier and more automatic it becomes. If you can repeatedly deploy the strategies above, they will eventually become your new habit and drinking less will not feel difficult.



Which of the strategies above feel like they will be useful for you? Write down those that you plan on putting into action and try to use them during and after your participation in the study.

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