



STOPPING DRINKING ALCOHOL STEPS AND TIPS

First of all, check with your doctor that it will be safe for you to stop drinking without medical supervision. For some people who have been drinking heavily over a number of years, they may need medical assistance as sudden cessation of alcohol consumption can lead to alcohol withdrawal seizures which can be life threatening. Rather than stopping completely and forever, sometimes it is possible to take an extended 'holiday' from heavy alcohol consumption, say for a year, and then return to light social drinking. For some people though, it may be necessary to stop drinking permanently.

Drinking is a reflexive and primary human behaviour, which we have all been doing since birth! The act of drinking itself is comforting and stimulates relaxation, we know this instinctively when we are children before we start consuming alcohol - we are so happy to have a drink of water when we are really thirsty or a delicious glass of squash or other tasty soft drink! Start retraining yourself today to enjoy and be aware of the act of drinking itself, just like you used to be able to do as a child.

If we have been drinking alcohol at unsafe levels and regularly over more than a few of years, cutting down isn't always a viable option. How do you know if you should cut down or stop completely? You can learn about How to Overcome Addiction in this YouTube video: https://youtu.be/NRF1WLR_X3Q. Generally, there are thought to be 10 signs of addiction that are covered in the video, and the more signs you have, the more likely you will benefit from stopping completely, at least for a fair chunk of time. Then it may be possible to go back to light social drinking.

When trying to stop drinking alcohol, it is unrealistic to plan for a life-long, eternal "I will never ever drink another drop again in my life." scenario, this is too much pressure to put on yourself. In the early stages, it is important to expect little slips and to take "one day" or "one week" at a time and see how it goes.

You will need to know in which situations you are going to find it more difficult not to drink and be prepared with other things to do to manage your emotional wellbeing at these times. This may need to be explored more fully in therapy.



STEP ONE - Pick a day to start. Go for a day when you are likely to be relaxed and not under pressure. Plan ahead for a day when it is easier to avoid alcohol.



STEP TWO - Work out in advance, as far as is possible, how you can avoid all those situations when you know you have often ended up drinking in the past. If you often drink at home, stock up on alternatives to alcohol, your preferred soft drinks, tea, coffee, whatever you like. You might tell certain other people that you are stopping, this should avoid them putting pressure on you to drink and they might even join you in stopping to support you. Have assertiveness statements ready for times when people do not listen to you that you either do not want to drink or do not want to go somewhere where you can get access to alcohol, e.g. pub, restaurant etc.



STEP THREE - Persevere! Do not give up if things don't always go completely to plan. Changing habits takes time and hard work and there will be occasions when you do have a 'slip' – this is all part of the learning process. Keep focusing on all the positive things you have achieved, for example, if you have not drunk for 6 out of 7 days in the last week, sure, acknowledge the 'slip' but also congratulate yourself on the great achievement of not drinking for those 6 days! Don't forget to give yourself pats on the back each and every day. When you do have a slip, see it as just that, just a slip, don't give up and see it is a full-blown 'relapse', it's just a minor blip, no matter how big or small or long or short the slip was for, set a new date and resume your no drinking as soon as you can.



STEP FOUR - record your thoughts and feelings in relation to the situations where drinking might have been your usual coping mechanism and that you struggle with. Record details about any slips here too, all this is 'grist for the mill' and will help you reach your goals.



STEP FIVE - If after several weeks of concerted effort you find it extremely difficult to cut down, you could think about seeing a trained alcohol counsellor or you can find more information, tips and contacts from Recovery Org <https://www.recovery.org.uk/alcohol-abuse/alcohol-abuse-helpline/> who will also be able to provide advice and support.

TIPS



Restrict Access to Alcohol & Do Not Keep Alcohol in Your Home/Car - make sure you do not tempt yourself by keeping alcohol in the house or putting yourself in situations where you can have access to alcohol – this is especially important in the early stages of not drinking.



Learning to Be Assertive - do not let anyone pressure you into having a drink. If you think saying no could be difficult, have some excuses and assertiveness statements lined up. But it is not just learning to be assertive in saying no to alcohol, you may need to learn to be assertive in a number of other areas and with a number of people in your life too.

Assertiveness is a very important way of building up self-esteem and confidence, that has likely been neglected or even damaged by alcohol use.



Alternative Activities to Drinking - getting out of the habit of drinking to manage your emotions is a learning process and you will have to find a number of alternative activities that you feel passionately about, that you find engaging, that you really look forward to and, perhaps most importantly of all, that will help you rebuild your self-esteem and self-confidence.



Reward Yourself & Be Compassionate with Yourself - celebrate your successes, treat yourself, do something special by yourself (and with others if you like), buy yourself something nice with the money and time you save from not drinking. When you have a slip, always be



understanding, compassionate and kind with yourself, never punish yourself, just pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start again.



Emergency Sugar Pack - keep with you a sweet treat and a soft sweet drink in case of emergencies when the urge to drink may be particularly powerful. As there is a high component of sugar in alcoholic drinks, some of the 'cravings' experienced when trying to stop drinking will be sugar-cravings. Consuming something sweet that is non-alcoholic will help lessen cravings and make them more manageable.



Emotional Management Skills Pack - develop an array of practical and psychological emotional management skills and techniques that you can fall back on instead of drinking to manage your emotions. You may need to work with a therapist to help you with this initially. Self-care is especially important, along with exercise, meditation, mindfulness, yoga, learning to play a musical instrument, learning to draw or developing your creative abilities in other ways - whatever things suit you best. An important part of finding other ways of coping with your emotional world without alcohol is through the use of humour and your imagination, again, you may need m.



Make Changes in Your Life - You may need to think about making some changes in relation to important parts of your life that might function to keep you vulnerable to falling back to alcohol as a coping strategy. These can be smaller things like changing the arrangement of furniture in your bedroom/living room and/or redecorating, or purchasing some new clothes and shoes to mark your determination to do things differently and start seeing yourself and your life differently. It might mean thinking about making bigger changes, like in your career and even making changes to some of your relationships.



Avoid Rash Decisions - as with all the other things involved in breaking up with alcohol, you may be able to stop drinking straight away but the attachment goes deeper and will take time for you to work your way through to the bottom of why you developed such a destructive relationship with what is, in effect, a diluted and corrosive poison. Making rash decisions and abrupt changes are not advisable, be patient, take things one step at a time and things will natural fall into place when the time is right.



Alcohol is NOT your friend - Remind yourself of this because alcohol is a dis-inhibitor that negatively changes the way the brain processes information. It is a depressant that reduces neuronal firing and thus reduces our ability to make good decisions and manage our emotions. It literally makes us more stupid when we are under its influence and this effect starts after only one or two drinks! The more we drink, the worse our decisions and behaviour become and the more likely we are to damage social relationships and put ourselves in physical danger. This contributes significantly to the debilitating 'hang-over' effect we can experience the next day of heightened/intense anxiety, guilt, shame, depression and self-reproach as we replay things we may have said and done the night before that we regret when sober.

Good luck!

