



Alcohol Use During the Lockdown

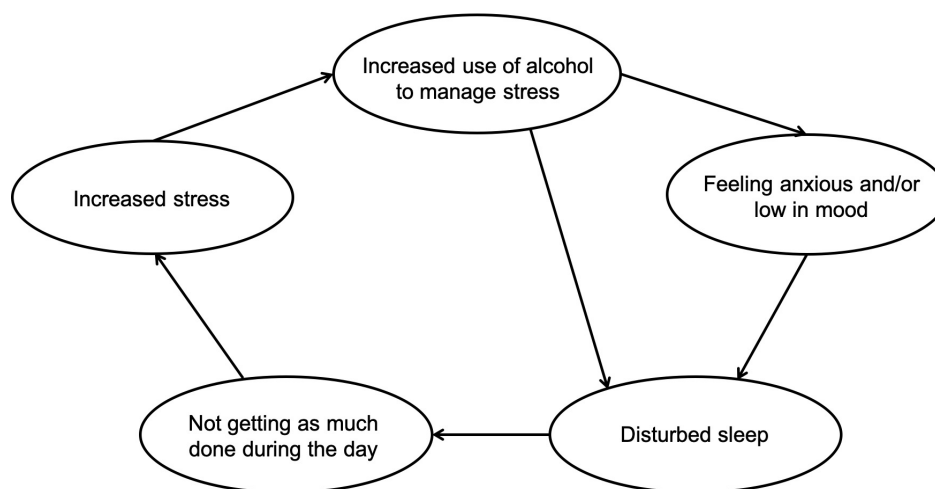
If you have found yourself drinking more alcohol during the lockdown you are not alone, according to a survey carried out by Alcohol Change UK, 1 in 5 people have been drinking more often since the lockdown started in March¹.

Prior to the lockdown you might have used a glass of wine or a beer in the evening to manage stress or reduce boredom at times. These are stressful times, and other coping strategies (going to the gym, seeing friends) are less accessible now. With companies now delivering alcohol to the door, drinking alcohol has become one of the most accessible coping strategies, and one of the few 'fun treats' we can still enjoy.

Even though an increase in drinking might be common among people you know, as we do not know how long lockdown will last, it is worth thinking about how sustainable your current alcohol intake is. Below is some advice that might help with cutting down on drinking, as well as signs to look out for that you might need extra support, and information on where to get that support.

What are the effects of increasing your alcohol intake?

While alcohol might seem like a harmless stress reliever, it can actually make things worse in the long run by contributing to increased anxiety, low mood and feelings of isolation. Alcohol can also disturb sleep and reduce productivity, leading to a vicious cycle by increasing stress levels.



The World Health Organisation (WHO) have released a warning that drinking too much can lower the immune system, which may increase the risk of catching COVID-19 as well as the risk of having complications while infected².



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What are the myths about alcohol and COVID-19 and how can I spot misinformation?

As now is such an uncertain time, it is easy for misinformation about alcohol and COVID-19 to be spread. Such misinformation can be harmful as it could encourage behaviour that affects your health negatively. Here are some common myths about alcohol and the virus, and facts confirmed by the WHO that are important to keep in mind:

- **Myth 1: Consuming alcohol destroys the virus that causes COVID-19.**
In fact, consuming alcohol does not destroy the virus. It is actually more likely to increase the health risks if a person becomes infected. Alcohol does work as a disinfectant on your skin, but has no such effect within your system when consumed.
- **Myth 2: Drinking strong alcohol kills the virus in the inhaled air.**
The consumption of alcohol will not kill the virus in the inhaled air and will not disinfect your mouth and throat.
- **Myth 3: Alcohol (beer, wine, distilled spirits or herbal alcohol) stimulates immunity and resistance to the virus.**
On the contrary, alcohol has a negative effect on your immune system and will not increase immunity and resistance to the virus. As mentioned earlier, a lowered immunity may even increase the risk of catching COVID-19 and having complications when infected.

As it is so easy for myths such as these to be circulated, it is good to be more aware and discerning of information online. Here are some tips:

- Seek trusted sources of information, such as WHO, national health authorities and your health professional.
- Double-check the information you receive. Beware of websites and texts that use the same messages and have the same writing and overall style, as these are likely to be viral messages meant to mislead.
- Be more aware of false claims relating to the effects of alcohol on health and immunity, and that alcohol might offer essential benefits that you really need during this time.
- Be more aware of websites and social media posts offering online sale and home delivery of alcoholic beverages.



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What is a 'normal' amount to drink?

According to the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines³, regardless of your gender you can achieve low risk drinking by following the advice below.

- Limit weekly intake to a maximum of 14 units of alcohol (14 units would look like 6 pints of 4% beer, OR 6 175ml glasses of 13% wine OR 14 single 25ml measures of spirits)



How many units of alcohol a week do you drink currently?

- Try to spread drinking out over the week rather than having one or two really heavy nights.
- If you are hoping to cut down on your drinking, establishing drink-free days can be helpful.

How will you spread out your 14 units across the week?

	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
No. units							

- During pregnancy you should not drink alcohol, as it can be damaging to your developing baby.

If you are worried about your levels of drinking, here is a [screening test](#) you can use to determine any possible risk, or if you might require more support.



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What are some tips and strategies that might be helpful if you want to cut down?

The current lockdown represents a pretty unique opportunity to experiment with cutting down your alcohol intake without the usual social pressures to drink.

1. Alternatives to alcohol:

- Follow the ritual of putting in effort to make a nice drink for yourself, you can even use ice and sliced fruit. If you are arranging a social call, you could challenge everyone to make the best mocktail and share the recipes. Make sure you have your favourite tea or soft drink on hand too.

What drink alternative will you make for yourself?

- There are also lots of low or no alcohol beer, wine, sparkling wine and spirit options to try out, be curious about the feelings that come up when you have these and whether you feel comfortable using these as an alternative to alcohol.

Why not have a look online now at what non-alcoholic options your nearest/usual supermarket sells?

2. Taking care of your well-being:

- *Check in with family and friends.* Staying connected through phone calls, video chats, or WhatsApp can have a positive impact on mood and ability to cope with feelings of boredom or frustration during this time.
- *Engage in healthy activities.* It is important to practice self-care during this stressful time, and engaging in activities like **exercise** as alternatives to drinking can be helpful for your mental and physical health. The WHO has some recommendations on [staying physically active](#) in isolation.
- *Maintain your daily routine as much as you can.* This includes having regular meal times and getting enough rest and sleep. 8-10 hours a night is a good amount of sleep to aim for. Keep in mind that alcohol can affect how well you sleep and lead to a less restful sleep on top of any anxiety you might be experiencing!



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- Our website has further helpful materials and strategies on **self-care**, including [relaxation and mindfulness](#), [staying on top of your sleep](#), and [tips to cope with isolation](#). These can help you cope during this stressful time in a healthier way.

How can you drink more mindfully? Some tips from Drinkaware⁴

- **Start using a measure** when pouring spirits or wine. It is really easy to make drinks much stronger or larger when free pouring at home and it is much harder to keep track of what you are drinking.
- **Switch to a smaller glass.** Drinking from large glasses can be deceptive and make it feel like you are drinking less than you are.
- **Don't forget your other fluids.** Try to alternate alcohol with glasses of water to avoid dehydration.
- **Avoid the temptation to top up.** Finishing your current drink before pouring the next helps you to keep track of how much you are drinking.
- **Notice any unhealthy habits** with alcohol and make a conscious decision to try to break these.
- **Notice situations or triggers** that might lead you to drinking more.
- If you think you would benefit from some help in being more aware and **keeping track of your alcohol intake**, there are some potentially useful mindful drinking apps that you can download as well, such as [Less](#), and [Drink Control](#).
- Alternatively, it can also be helpful to keep a diary such as [this one](#).

Where can you find further online support and information on alcohol and COVID-19?

If you find that you need or would benefit from further online support relating to alcohol and COVID-19, there are many resources available you can access.

- [Club Soda](#) offers information and courses on mindful drinking. They also have an online community, guides and even podcasts about drinking and COVID-19.
- [Drink Aware](#) offers information and practical advice on their website on drinking and mental health in isolation.
- [Down Your Drink](#) has all sorts of resources and tools to help with managing drinking, including a unit calculator, and a drink diary.



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- [Alcohol Change](#) UK has pages dedicated to supporting people who might need further support; some of the links below are summarised below are on their website as well. If you need more information on your current levels of drinking, they also provide an online calculator.
- Smart Recovery offers online support and online [meetings](#).
- If you find yourself struggling and need somebody to speak with, there are also organisations that offer helplines. [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) offers a hotline open 24/7 on **0800 9177 650**. Drinkline available on **0300 123 1110** is another free, confidential helpline for people concerned about their drinking or somebody else's.

Where can I find online support for if my parents or family members are experiencing difficulties with alcohol consumption during this time?

- [Al-Anon](#) offers support to families and friends of dependent drinkers. They have a confidential helpline on 020 7403 0888.
- [Nacoa](#) supports people affected by their parent(s) drinking.
 - They have an [FAQ page](#) with questions about alcohol and the effects on family.
 - They have also published a [COVID-19 online resource pack](#).

References

1. <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help-now/coronavirus-information-and-advice-hub>
2. http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/437608/Alcohol-and-COVID-19-what-you-need-to-know.pdf
3. <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/alcoholic-drinks-units/latest-uk-alcohol-unit-guidance/>
4. <https://www.drinkaware.ie/latest/practical-advice-for-sober-curious-and-mindful-drinking-at-home-in-covid-19-isolation>