

Mental Health & Wellbeing at the Bar

Alcohol Addiction



Wellbeing
at the Bar

Alcohol Addiction

Alcohol is the cheapest it has ever been. These days it is socially acceptable to drink at home as well as socially. In the UK the number of licensed premises has increased by over 45% since 1970.

In 2014 alcohol was almost 54% more affordable than in 1980. It is easy to see how addictions and dependency become sustainable in all parts of society. Although the overall trend in alcohol consumption has been an increase in abstinence, particularly in younger people (under 30), middle-aged people (age 45 – 64) are the least likely to abstain from alcohol.

Quick thinking and intellectual capacity is a vital strength in the legal profession and can be significantly damaged by alcohol dependence.

Alcohol is a depressant which means that long-term use leads to poor concentration, difficulty in thinking clearly, challenges with problem-solving and short-term memory loss.

You might also ask yourself these questions;

1. Do I always feel the 'need' to have a drink?
2. Does my drinking frequently result in problems in life such as lateness, letting people down, inability to commit to promises made at work or personally?
3. Do other people worry about or 'nag' me about my drinking, wishing I would cut down or stop?

If you can answer positively to two or more of these then it may be time to acknowledge and address your drinking habits.

How can I reduce my drinking at home?

There are some simple things you can do straightaway to reduce your drinking at home and in social situations;

At home:

1. **Have at least 2 dry days per week**
2. **Change your routine.** Drinking can become habitual, our brains quickly 're-wire' with repeated learned behaviours. You could try changing your routine – if you usually have a drink when you get home, could you distract yourself with another activity?
3. **Pace yourself.** Change4Life (the UK government health promotion service) advocate 'pacing and spacing' – sipping your drink slowly to appreciate the flavours and drinking a soft drink or water after each alcoholic drink
4. **Try lower alcohol drinks** – there are plenty of low alcohol wines and beers on the market
5. **Include food in your drinking** so you aren't drinking on an empty stomach. Put the bottle away once you've filled your glass
6. **Go for a smaller bottle of beer or glass of wine** than usual
7. **Buy a drinks measure** so you are fully aware of the volume you are drinking
8. **Distract yourself.** When you're tempted to have a drink, try an active distraction technique – ring a friend, read a chapter of your book, or take a brisk walk
9. **Take part in a 'dry' month** and raise money for your favourite charity. There are plenty of organised ones or kick-start your own with friends. Write down how you feel physically and mentally as a result. This record enables you to reflect on personal success.

How can I cut down on my drinking socially?

Socially in the UK it is both easy and socially acceptable to drink alcohol. It can be really hard to reduce your alcohol intake when so much of our daily lives are surrounded by opportunities to drink. However, here are some great tips from Change4Life.

1. **Can you meet your friends somewhere other than a pub or restaurant?** Perhaps a coffee shop
2. **Be ready with your reason for not drinking** when you're offered 'just another one'. The quicker you can respond the more likely people are to accept it and move on
3. **Tell your friends and family you are cutting down** and enlist their support
4. **Sit down to drink.** Apparently we drink more when we are standing up. Finding a seat in the pub may be all you need to encourage you to slow down
5. **Try a new hobby.** Could you focus on that with a friend instead of going for your usual drink?
6. **Offer to be the designated driver** in exchange for all your soft drinks being bought by your passengers. Many find this a great incentive to remain sober for the night

Where can I find out more?

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx>
- www.addiction.org.uk
- <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>
- <https://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/>
- <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>
- Call Drinkline on 0300 123 1110