

# Mental Health & Wellbeing at the Bar

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Substance abuse



Wellbeing  
at the Bar

# Substance Abuse

In 2015/16, around 1 in 12 (8.4%) adults aged 16 to 59 in England and Wales had taken an illicit drug in the last year. This equates to around 2.7 million people.

In 2015/16, 57% of adults reported drinking alcohol in the previous week, which equates to 25.3 million adults in England.

Young people are often the most affected by excessive drinking due to peer pressure and a greater likelihood of experimentation with drugs and alcohol. Coupled with the higher likelihood for higher earners to drink alcohol<sup>1</sup> makes it all the more important for graduates and pupils to be aware of the damaging effect of substance abuse on their future and practice.

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

If a person develops alcoholism or other drug dependency, the long-term effect can have negative personal, financial and social ramifications.

## Alcohol

It might be worth asking yourself the following questions;

1. Do I feel a strong 'need' to have a drink?
2. Does my drinking frequently result in problems in my personal and/ or professional life (e.g. lateness, complaints from friends and colleagues about my unreliability, inability to commit to promises made)
3. Do other people worry about or 'nag' me about my drinking?

## Drugs

It might be worth asking yourself the following questions;

1. Do I feel a strong desire to take drugs?
2. Does my drug habit frequently result in problems in my personal and/ or professional life (e.g. lateness, complaints from friends and colleagues about my unreliability, inability to commit to promises made)
3. Are others aware of how frequently I take drugs? If so, have they expressed concern about this?

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

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics – Statistics on Alcohol Report (3 May 2017)

## How can I reduce my intake of drugs/ alcohol at home?

Always remember that the underlying problem needs to be addressed or it will not go away. In the meantime, if you are really struggling to control how much you are drinking, or are concerned about other drug use, here are some tips:

1. **Have at least 2 dry days per week**
2. **Change your routine.** Drinking and taking addictive substances can become habitual; our brains quickly 're-wire' with repeated learned behaviours. If you have fallen into a routine where drinking and/or drugs are the norm, it might be helpful to distract yourself with another activity e.g. call a friend, read a blog or a chapter of a book, or take a brisk walk.
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 content drinks or less harmful drugs** – if you still feel the need to drink or take drugs, then it might be useful to take steps to wean yourself off e.g. reducing the harmful impact these substances have on your body.
5. **Try not to drink alcohol on an empty stomach** and put the bottle away once you've filled your glass so that you can slowly curtail the amount you drink.
6. **Choose a smaller quantity** – when you have the choice, opt for a smaller bottle or size of drug. Also, buy a drinks measure so that you are fully aware of the volume you are ingesting at all times.
7. **Take part in a 'dry' month** – this can be a good way to not only reduce your intake but also do something good for others e.g. sign up and raise money for your favourite charity. There are plenty of organised ones or kick-start your own with friends.
8. **Keep track of your progress** – it might be useful to write down how you are feeling physically and mentally on a regular basis. This record enables you to reflect on your personal success.

## How can I cut down on my drinking and/or drug taking socially?

Always remember that the underlying problem needs to be addressed. However, if in the meantime you are really struggling to control how much you are drinking, or are concerned about other drug use, here are some tips to help you slowly reduce your drinking and/or substance use in social settings:

1. **Find alternatives** – try and find places other than pubs or restaurants to meet with friends outside of work e.g. coffee shop or the park.
2. **Excuses can be excused** – if you can, practice a genuine reason why you may not be drinking when you are offered 'just another one' e.g. offer to be the designated driver or

explain that you are taking part in dry month. The quicker you can respond, the higher the likelihood that people will accept your reason and move on.

3. **Support and Connect** – share your addiction with those you feel comfortable doing so with, and enlist their support if you decide to cut down your intake. This will be incredibly hard to do on your own, and it might be useful to not only have the support of friends and family.
4. **Sit down to drink** – we drink more when we are standing up, so try to find a seat when drinking in future.
5. **Try something new** – if you have ever considered taking up a hobby or activity, this might be the time.

## Where can I find out more?

### Alcohol

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx>
- Addiction - [www.addiction.org.uk](http://www.addiction.org.uk)
- Alcoholics Anonymous - [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)
- Alcohol Concern - [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)
- Drink Aware - [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)
- Call **Drinkline** on 0300 123 1110

### Drugs

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/drugs/Pages/Drugtreatment.aspx>
- <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21159/drug-misu-eng-2016-rep.pdf>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/oct/05/-sp-drug-use-is-rising-in-the-uk-but-were-not-addicted>