

10 Tips for Cutting Down on Your Drinking

Caution: If you are physically addicted to alcohol, consult your physician before cutting down on your drinking. Reducing your drinking too quickly may put you at risk of suffering serious withdrawal symptoms that can jeopardize your health and well-being.

1. **Write down your specific reasons for changing your drinking habits.** Is it to improve your health and avoid illness, to sleep better, to feel better about yourself, or to get along better with family or friends? Whatever your reasons, write them down.
2. **Set a realistic goal and time frame.** Make sure that you choose a target level and frequency of alcohol consumption that all but guarantees that you will experience no negative consequences from your drinking. For example: "I will have no more than one drink with dinner, no more often than three times a week, and not go above that drinking level for at least three months." Similarly, if you choose to not drink at all for a while, set a firm quitting date and then try to maintain abstinence for at least several weeks or months.
3. **Keep a drinking diary.** Keep a daily log of every drink you have for a period of 3-4 weeks to monitor how well you stick to your goal.
4. **Drink slowly.** Sip your drinks slowly and space them out. Have a glass of soda, water or juice after each drink. Don't drink on an empty stomach. Eat before you drink and in between drinks.
5. **Designate certain non-drinking days.** Choose a day or two or three each week when you will not drink at all. Or try not drinking at all for five days or more in a row. Observe how you feel physically and emotionally on your non-drinking days.
6. **Practice drink refusal skills.** You don't have to drink when other people drink and you don't have to accept a drink when it is offered to you. Practice ways to say no politely, but convincingly. For example, you can tell people that you just feel much better when you drink less or not at all.
7. **Avoid temptations and pressures to drink.** Stay away from people who drink a lot and from bars or parties where there is strong pressure to drink. Avoid places where you previously drank a lot since they can stimulate your desire to drink excessively again.
8. **Don't drink when you are emotionally upset.** Do not drink when you are angry, sad, lonely, frustrated, hurt, anxious, or generally having a bad day. Try talking things out with a trusted friend or relative rather than numbing your upset with alcohol.
9. **Get support and stay active.** Ask family members and close friends for support to help you change your drinking habits. Keep busy to avoid boredom.
10. **Don't give up!** Drinking habits are not always easy to change. Don't get discouraged. Persistence is the key to success.