



## Personal Tool Rethinking Drinking

It is tempting with the end of most heightened physical distancing restrictions and a vaccine allegedly “just around the corner” to feel celebratory and joyful. For those who like to party, this can seem like the best excuse yet. If during COVID and whatever restrictions you endured, your alcohol intake increased, perhaps it is time to reflect before launching into the “silly season”.

Psychologists across the globe will say, when asked, that the easiest way to predict your future behaviour is to understand your past. When it comes to reviewing your drinking, ask yourself why am I drinking? To relax, to unwind or to get through the day or to help me sleep or to help me cope with my work, family, children? The issue isn't drinking but why do we drink? If we are drinking to cope with uncomfortable feelings like anxiety, we may be avoiding dealing with those feelings underneath and in the long term this leads to more serious issues including depression. These are large questions and the easiest way to answer these is to brainstorm how you want to feel and what kind of life you would like to lead.

Lockdown and livers have had a negative correlation this year – meaning when lockdowns were active the livers were impacted. Research tells us that alcohol consumption went up by 20%<sup>1</sup> during lockdowns in both Australia and New Zealand. The reasons for this spike could be boredom, stress or wanting a way to mark the end of the workday – while working at home.

Alcohol is present in so many aspects of our social and family lives if it feels overwhelming to make a change, keep at it. Many people review their drinking and find that the changes are more than achievable and with some tools and strategies they do quite well.

### Tricks and tips for rethinking drinking:

- **Set a realistic goal** - go through the rest of December and see how many social events and parties you have on. Look at how many drinks you would like to have at each event and either take those with you (if it is BYO) or think of which drink you are going to consume before going. Set a limit and then evaluate again.
- **Count Your Drinks** - do not let the waiter fill up your ever-empty glass. Smile put your hand over your glass and say, “no thank you” or “fill me up next time you come past”. Otherwise you have no idea how many and over what time frame.
- **Measure Your Drinks** - if doing this at home, pour yourself a glass of your favourite drink and fill it to your normal capacity. Then grab an old-fashioned measuring cup and see how many mLs it is. Think then about how many standard drinks you are consuming. If you are unclear on what a standard is look here: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol>  
Be aware of the capacity of the wine glasses you purchase. A white wine glass can vary in size by up to 200mls. The smaller the size means a generously filled glass is more likely to yield a standard drink.



- **Pace Yourself** - if you have not been out with friends for a while it can be tempting to just not think, keep track or just consume. Remember that if have been in the home more and socialising less lately, you may be out of practice and going slower can be helpful in easing yourself back in.
- **Space Your Drinks** with water, soda, soft drink, or a juice. Be flamboyant with trying new and interesting non-alcoholic drinks and see what good tasting flavours exist.
- **Remember to Eat** - how many times at a Christmas party have you rushed from one place to another and simply forgotten to eat? The party, the fun and the people mean that you are less likely to remember to do so. Put this on your to do list when you are going out (like remembering your wallet and keys).
- **Avoid Your Triggers** if you are stressed, sad or angry drinking will only deepen that mood. Sure, the first one takes the edge off but remember whatever mood you were in before consuming the alcohol it is likely to return and with a vengeance.
- **Do Something Else** - talk to someone at the party or on the phone if you are at home, go for a walk or look at distractions that help to ease the cravings.

If you are thinking about speaking with an EAP professional about alcohol use and/or drinking post lockdown, please do give us a call and we can discuss tools and ideas to assist. Remember, as your EAP, we are here to support you whatever the nature of your concerns. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

[1] <https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/alcohol-consumption-increases-during-covid-19-crisis>

*AccessEAP acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we work on and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.*

