

If you have become physically dependent and need to stop drinking completely, stopping overnight could be harmful.

You should get advice about this and about any medicine you may need to do this safely.

The sorts of withdrawal symptoms that suggest you may need medicine include:

- anxiety after waking
- sweating and tremors
- nausea or retching in the morning
- vomiting
- hallucinations
- seizures or fits

Staying healthy and in control.

Cutting down or stopping drinking is usually just the beginning, and most people will need some degree of help or a long-term plan to stay in control or completely alcohol free.

Getting the right support can be crucial to maintaining control in the future. Only relying on family, friends or carers for this often is not enough.

Ask a GP or alcohol service about what longer-term support is available in your area.

Self-help or mutual aid groups (groups such as AA or SMART Recovery groups) are accessible in most areas.

Useful contacts for alcohol problems

Drinkline is the national alcohol helpline. If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline in complete confidence. Call 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 9am to 8pm, weekends 11am to 4pm).

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a free self-help group. Its "12 step" programme involves getting sober with the help of regular support groups.

Simple tips for cutting down

Make a plan

Before you start drinking, set a limit on how much you're going to drink.

Set a budget

Only take a fixed amount of money to spend on alcohol.

Let them know

If you let your friends and family know you're cutting down and it's important to you, you could get support from them.

Take it a day at a time

Cut back a little each day. That way, every day you do is a success.

Make it a smaller one

You can still enjoy a drink, but go for smaller sizes. Try bottled beer instead of pints, or a small glass of wine instead of a large one.

Have a lower-strength drink

Cut down the alcohol by swapping strong beers or wines for ones with a lower strength (ABV in %). You'll find this information on the bottle.

Stay hydrated

Have a glass of water before you have alcohol and alternate alcoholic drinks with water or other non-alcoholic drinks.

Take a break

Have several drink-free days each week.

Benefits of cutting down

The immediate effects of cutting down include:

feeling better in the mornings

being less tired during the day

better looking skin

feeling more energetic

better weight management

Long-term benefits include:

Mood

There's a strong link between heavy drinking and depression, and hangovers often make you feel anxious and low. If you already feel anxious or sad, drinking can make this worse, so cutting down may put you in a better mood generally.

Sleep

Drinking can affect your sleep. Although it can help some people fall asleep quickly, it can disrupt your sleep patterns and stop you sleeping deeply. So cutting down on alcohol should help you feel more rested when you wake up.

Behaviour

Drinking can affect your judgement and behaviour. You may behave irrationally or aggressively when you're drunk. Memory loss can be a problem during drinking and in the long term for regular heavy drinkers.

Heart

Long-term heavy drinking can lead to your heart becoming enlarged. This is a serious condition that can't be completely reversed, but stopping drinking can stop it getting worse.

Immune system

Regular drinking can affect your body's ability to fight infections. Heavy drinkers tend to catch more infectious diseases.