

# HEALTH ACTION CAMPAIGN

because prevention is better than cure

## Alcohol and Drugs



*“Twenty first century living can be hard but using alcohol to help cope with its pressures, particularly for people who already struggling, for whatever reason, to keep their heads above water is not the solution.”*  
Elaine Hindal, Chief Executive of Drinkaware

### Did you know?

A survey of nearly 9,000 adults aged 18 to 85, carried out by Public Health England and Drinkaware in 2018, found that four out of five people were drinking within than the government's 14 unit-a-week guidelines.

## **Find a personal motivation**

Addiction and substance abuse have a significant impact on the people around you. If you're trying to tackle an addiction or simply reduce your drinking day-to-day, think about the positive impact it will have on your friends and family. Alcohol Research UK found the physical and mental health of family members and their quality of life are positively influenced when a loved one is in recovery, but are equally susceptible to reversals during a relapse.

## **Have a positive mind-set**

Whether you have an addiction or would simply like to reduce how often you drink casually, it's important to feel positive about your next steps. The NHS advises that addiction is a treatable condition. Whatever the addiction, there are lots of ways you can seek help.

## **Set SMART goals and measure success**

Whatever it is you want to cut back on, tap into your competitive streak and set yourself some goals. According to a study by the American Psychological Association, setting goals at the beginning of a treatment plan to reduce drinking is often predictive of success. And in a trial with 128 young, male adults, all of whom were heavy drinkers but weren't necessarily committed to cutting back, the study revealed that setting initial, ambitious goals led to further ambitious goals, which ultimately contributed to lower levels of drinking.

## **Be committed to making a change**

There are lots of interventions and tools to help people tackle addiction or over-consumption of alcohol and drugs. One study looked at 119,713 people using an app produced by Drinkaware, designed to help monitor and reduce their alcohol consumption. It concluded the app is a useful tool for raising awareness about drinking and potentially reducing consumption, but primarily in individuals already committed to making such changes. Find an intervention that works for you but remember it's more likely to work if you're committed to making a change.

## Find peer support

Some people with addictions find peer support helpful. This is usually in the form of support from other people with similar conditions or circumstances relating to substance abuse, past or present. A review of studies into support groups as part of addiction treatment found they show promise, although more research is needed to verify that they genuinely contribute to success. Whether you're recovering from addiction or you just want to cut back for health reasons, sometimes just having family and friends who are understanding can work wonders. If someone tells you you're boring for not drinking or taking drugs, they probably don't have your best interests at heart.

## Be flexible to stay on track

If you're looking to reduce how much alcohol you consume day-to-day, try giving up for just one month to see how you get on. It might inspire you to give up completely, or significantly reduce how much you drink in subsequent months. Alcohol Concern reports that of registered participants in "Dry January", 62% had better sleep and more energy, whilst 49% lost weight.

## Case study:

The New Statesman reports that Hannah Smith gave up alcohol two years ago after deciding that drinking was draining her time, money and energy in exchange for supposed fun she could barely remember.

*Naomi Adams December 2018*