**7 science-based steps to embrace mindful drinking**

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night feeling anxious, afraid and unable to go back to sleep? You ask yourself, “How is this possible? I only had a few glasses of wine.” But as you watch the minutes tick away, you wish you’d had one fewer glass the previous day.

***That* is your brain on alcohol.**

“Alcohol releases endorphins or pleasure hormones in our brains, making us happier, less stressed and more sociable,” says Tonja Dodd, Senior Health Strategy Analyst at Vitality USA. “It also lowers inhibitions which may explain why some people do things like drink and drive.”

Moreover, a 2017 study published in the [British Medical Journal](https://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j2353) found that even moderate alcohol use causes the part of the brain that affects memory and reasoning, the hippocampus, to shrink over time,” she adds, “which may contribute to decline in cognitive function.”

Not only does drinking alcohol interfere with your sleep, ability to make good decisions, memory, and cognitive function, it’s also associated with symptoms of [depression](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21382111/) and [anxiety](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/alcohol-and-mental-health).

“If you struggle with anxiety, as many of us understandably do nowadays, a drink can make you feel more relaxed in the short term,” Dodd explains, “but regularly drinking to relax may result in alcohol dependence, and hangovers almost always make anxiety worse.”

**The good news?** Making informed choices about when, where and how much you drink can boost your health *and* your happiness.

**7 science-based ways to embrace mindful drinking**

1. **Follow the (young) herd**

All the wellness trends for 2023 are saying the same thing: from dry January to sober curiosity, people are choosing to drink more mindfully. Americans are drinking less in general and young people, especially Gen Zs, are actively choosing not to drink alcohol. “We tend to want to follow the herd,” says Katy Milkman in the [*Art of Manliness Podcast*](https://www.artofmanliness.com/character/behavior/podcast-705-the-best-tools-for-personal-change/), so let this be a sign to drink less.

1. **Get a sober curious buddy or join a support group**

We all need a little help from our friends. “There are benefits to surrounding ourselves with people who can show us the way and make us believe it’s doable,” Milkman says in the same podcast. If you want to drink more mindfully, joining online communities like [**#SoberTok**](https://www.tiktok.com/tag/sobertok)is a fun way to connect and engage with people ‘’like you’.

1. **Choose quality over quantity**

Part of mindful drinking is choosing how much you drink. Young people around the world are choosing to enjoy alcohol-free beers and gins or savouring an expensive bottle of wine instead of binging cheap poor-quality alcohol.

1. **Reset your default**

If drinking with your friends is your default social activity, mix it up. Start finding new ways to have fun like playing boardgames, going for art classes, finally learning how to dance or having healthy picnics in the park.

1. **Find an alternative “high”**

There are many healthier ways to relax and boost your mood, like yoga and meditation. Want to feel a *real* rush of endorphins? Go for a 5km parkrun, start riding a bicycle again ([mountain biking is great for your memory](https://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/understand-cancer-mountain-biking-memory-boost)) or join a high-intensity workout like a boxing class. You’ll feel great. We promise.

1. **Track your habits in a journal or mindfulness app**

One way to be more aware of our emotions and vulnerability is to write about it. You may prefer good old-fashioned pen to paper, or you can track your thoughts and feelings in an online journal or a mindfulness app.

1. **Convince someone else**

Come up with 10 reasons why you want to drink more diverse drinks, like coffee, mocktails, freshly squeezed juices or even pure water. By convincing someone else, you’ll also convince yourself.

**Vitality is here for your mental wellbeing**

The Vitality Mental Wellbeing programme helps members gain a more detailed view of their overall mental state and rewards them for taking proactive steps to understand, improve and maintain their mental wellbeing.

“We incentivise members with Vitality points to complete mental wellbeing assessments twice a year,” Dodd explains. The online assessment measures depression, anxiety, sleep, wellbeing, resilience and drinking and helps members understand key elements of their overall wellbeing.

“At-risk drinking habits like having 3 to 4 drinks at a time can have significant and negative effects on your mental wellbeing and may also be a sign of underlying mental health challenges,” Dodd adds. “By encouraging members to do these assessments, Vitality can recommend early interventions to help manage their drinking habits and put them on the road to improved mental and physical health.”