



THE DRINKS ARE ON ME!

How do you manage stress, and how can you spot the signs of a drink problem?

**Acknowledgment:
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Enjoying a glass or two of wine or beer after a period of intense concentration and exertion is a great way to unwind. Alcohol sedates the nervous system and can make us feel more gregarious. It is no wonder that performing artists use alcohol as their favourite way of relaxing after a show.

However, there is a fine line between using alcohol to relax and using it as the main way of managing stress and anxiety. We develop tolerance, so that we need more and more to achieve the same effect. This can creep up on us as we change our self-imposed drinking rules. We say we only drink at weekends but then our weekend starts on a Thursday and ends on a Tuesday ... A person may be able to drink without apparent effects on health, relationships or career for many years.

At what point a person's alcohol use becomes problematic is very subjective. But there are a few sure-fire signs: anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, procrastinating, having a shorter fuse than normal. It's always better to work this out for yourself, rather than to be told by others.

Ask yourself:

Which of these applies to you*?	Never	Rarely	Frequently
• I drink because I am bored	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink because my friends drink	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink because it helps me to relax after a show	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink because it makes me feel good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink to forget my problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink because it gives me confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink in order to celebrate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink because it makes me feel at ease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink because I feel I have to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink to be sociable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink because there is nothing else to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink to be polite	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink to make me feel able to go on stage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink when I feel angry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I drink when I feel really bad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* This is based on material from the World Health Organization www.who.int – commonly known as the AUDIT questionnaire

The more you tick 'frequently', the more you need to think about your physical and mental health, your personal and professional relationships – and your finances!

Some ways you can cut down

1. Make a decision to cut down and make a written contract with yourself to try your hardest to do so. Then tell others about that decision.
2. Make a list of all your reasons for cutting down.
3. Keep a weekly drinking diary. Record when and where you drank, how much you drank, and who with. Add up your consumption in units for the week.
4. Identify your most vulnerable times of the day or week and who you are likely to be with. See if there is any pattern to your drinking.
5. Work out a set of drinking rules for yourself and write them down. Examples:
 - a. I will never drink before 8pm.
 - b. I will never drink for more than three hours at a time.
 - c. I will stop drinking with Tony.
 - d. I will stop drinking strong lager.
6. Have a daily cut-off point and move to water or soft drinks when you reach it.
7. Slow down. Pace your drinking; if you are going to be in a pub for three hours and you only want to have three pints, that's one every hour, maybe alternating with non-alcoholic drinks. Take smaller sips. Always put your glass down between sips. Occupy yourself (e.g. playing pool!)
8. Reward your successes. If you achieve your goals, buy yourself a treat.
9. Look for alternatives to alcohol. This involves looking at the way you drink. Is it to reduce anxiety or boredom, to increase confidence, or to beat feelings of depression? Do something else about these problems.
10. If you get a craving, delay your drinking for as long as possible. Distract yourself. Challenge your thoughts: 'I really need a drink.' 'Rubbish. I don't need a drink. I want a drink because I feel tense'.
11. Expect a relapse and don't be devastated by it. Old habits are hard to break. Keep trying.

One unit of alcohol = ½ pint of ordinary strength lager, one small glass of wine or one pub measure of spirits. Remember, though, that alcohol varies in strength, and also when we are pouring drinks for ourselves and our friends, we are invariably more generous!

If you have concerns

- You can get a free confidential assessment at one of the BAPAM clinics. These clinics are given by general physicians or GPs and they have access to a range of practitioners who have experience of working with performing artists.
- You can contact one of our counsellors direct by using the online directory.
- If you are concerned about a colleague, you might make enquiries with the management as to how the organisation approaches problem drinking.

Other sources of help

Al-Anon (support for families of alcoholics) – www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Alcoholics Anonymous – www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Alcohol Concern – www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

SEE ALSO ...

BAPAM Factsheet 4
Sensible eating for performers