

How can I be responsible while drinking? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What are strategies for drinking less in a social situation or for avoiding driving while impaired?

Answer

Dear Reader,

First off, bottoms up to you for seeking out info about keeping drinking in check! To maintain the safety of everyone around, and to avoid being “that person” at a soirée (you know, the one stuck in the bathroom sick all night), it’s helpful to know strategies for limiting or pacing your drinking. Additionally, there are a number of steps that can be taken to prevent driving after having consumed alcohol. If you’re looking to implement some strategies to reduce alcohol consumption, depending on the type of social situation and setting, you may want to try different approaches. Here are a few suggestions to get you started if you choose to drink:

- **Eat before or during drinking.** Having food in the belly helps slow the absorption of alcohol through the lining of your stomach. It can also help you avoid a hangover ^[2].
- **Decide on a set number of drinks ahead of time and stick to it.** The recommended limits for men are no more than four drinks in a day and no more than 14 in a week. For women, the recommended limits are no more than three drinks per day and no more than seven drinks in a week. This is considered moderate levels of drinking and staying within these limits can help reduce harm to yourself and others.
- **Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.** Some people report feeling like the odd one out if they don’t have a drink in their hand at a party or at the bar. If that’s the case for you, try alternating between alcoholic drinks and non-alcoholic drinks. Soda, juice, seltzer, or non-alcoholic beers are good alternate options that also happen to be alcohol look-a-likes.
- **Dilute your drink.** If you’re drinking liquor, use more mixer. Not only will you consume less alcohol, your drink may also taste better.
- **Add extra ice to your drink.** If you have access to ice (and are drinking something you’d like to be cold), you can also slow your alcohol consumption by adding extra ice.
- **Pace yourself.** Drinking more slowly can also help you drink less and maintain a healthier buzz for a longer duration.

- **Enlist a friend's support in monitoring your consumption and cutting you off.** If you're concerned you won't be able to reduce your drinking on your own, seek support from a friend. You can ask that they tell you to stop after a specific number of drinks or after a certain time in the evening. Just make sure it's a friend who will be able to remain sober enough to pay attention.
- **Avoid drinking games.** Drinking games can be a way to drink a lot in a short period of time, often more than you first intended.
- **Avoid shots.** Shots are the opposite of pacing yourself and can feel deceptive because it looks like a small amount of liquor, but they're generally very high in alcohol content.
- **Spend time with friends who consume less.** Many people report that being with heavier drinkers can make it harder to cut back, even if there's no peer pressure to drink. This may be because drinking more heavily becomes normalized. If this is the case for you, consider participating in some social situations that involve little or no drinking or attending social events with a crew that tends to drink less.

Here are some ideas that people have used successfully to avoid driving while impaired that you could use for yourself or a friend:

- **Take cabs.** Program the phone numbers for local cab companies on your cell phone, especially if you don't live in a place where you can hail a taxi from the street. You can drive to your destination and leave your car at the end of the night, making your way home via cab. You can also consider taking a cab to your destination so that driving home isn't even an option.
- **Appoint a sober designated driver.** If you're going to social situations in a group, choose a designated driver or someone who is sober for the night. Rotate different friends as the sober driver on different nights.
- **Take public transit.** Some places have better public transportation options than others. If it's an option where you live, take advantage of it. If you're new to navigating the system, look up the routes, cost, and timing before going out, when you're still sober.
- **Decide on alternate sleeping arrangements ahead of time.** If driving home isn't an option, can you ask around to see if you can crash with a friend who lives nearby?
- **Decide to stop drinking two hours before you leave an event.** For example, if you think you'll want to leave an event at around two a.m., stop drinking at midnight. This won't guarantee that you're sober enough to drive by two a.m., but it may result in you becoming sober enough to decide not to drive. It's also good hangover prevention to switch to hydrating fluids for a couple of hours before you go to sleep after a night of heavy drinking. Two hours of drinking water is likely to make the morning less painful.

If you or someone you know is struggling with being able to consume alcohol in a safe manner as a college student, consider investigating whether there are staff on campus, such as a health promotion specialist or a substance abuse prevention educator, who can facilitate one-on-one conversations meant to assist students in a non-judgmental environment as they explore their relationship to substances. If this type of resource isn't available, making an appointment with a health care provider or mental health professional to discuss these concerns may also be helpful. For more general information on alcohol, check out the *Go Ask Alice! Alcohol and Other Drugs* ^[3] archives.

Cheers!

Alice!

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