

Sober Curious?

What You Need to Know About Cutting Back Your Drinking



What Is Sober Curiosity?

If you're tired of the brain fog and sluggishness that follows a night of drinking with friends, the "sometimes sober" movement may be for you.

The term **sober curious** is flexible and inclusive. Unlike a strict sober lifestyle, many dabbling in sober curiosity simply scale back their alcohol consumption, while others abstain completely.

Mild and moderate drinkers may commit to full-time sobriety, touting health benefits, weight loss, and better interpersonal relationships. Others may decide to give up a glass of wine at dinner for better sleep or participate in "Dry January" or "Sober September" to save money.

It's a growing trend, with adults choosing to sip craft mocktails at bars throughout the country. Being sober curious doesn't always mean renouncing happy hours, but being selective and intentional about consuming alcohol comes with many perks.

If you're sober curious, this guide can help.

Does Being Sober Curious Mean I Have to Stop Drinking?

No! The sober curious lifestyle is a spectrum. It ranges from people who simply want to drink less to those who hope to abstain from alcohol entirely.

Many social drinkers in the sober curious movement have never struggled with alcohol use disorder. Instead, they may want to improve their health, relationships, and finances by drinking less.

Some moderate drinkers do, however, find they were more dependent on alcohol than they originally thought after cutting down.

What Does It Mean to Drink in Moderation?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers moderate drinking in adults of legal age to be limited to two drinks a day or less for men and one drink a day or less for women.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:



- **Men who consume more than four drinks on any day, or more than 14 drinks per week, are considered heavy drinkers.** Binge drinking in men usually corresponds with consuming five or more drinks in about two hours.
- **Women who consume more than three drinks on any day, or more than seven drinks a week, are considered heavy drinkers.** Binge drinking in women usually corresponds with drinking four or more drinks in about two hours.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines binge drinking as consuming four to five or more alcoholic drinks on the same occasion in the past month.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers a standard drink to be:

- 12 ounces of beer with 5% alcohol content.
- 8 ounces of malt liquor with 7% alcohol content.
- 5 ounces of wine with 12% alcohol content.
- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits or liquor.



What Are the Benefits of Limiting Alcohol?

The more you reduce your alcohol intake, the more likely you are to experience a range of benefits, according to the American Addiction Centers. One 2016 “Dry January” study published in the National Library of Medicine found that of 850 participants voluntarily abstaining from alcohol during that month:

- 82% reported feeling a sense of achievement.
- 62% reported getting better sleep.
- 49% reported losing weight.

Other benefits of reducing alcohol consumption, according to the American Addiction Centers, include:

- Better hydration.
- Improved skin complexion.
- Less liver fat and a lower risk of some cancers.
- Improved mental health and cognitive function.
- Lower blood pressure.
- More energy.
- More money.

How Does Drinking Affect Your Health?

Drinking too much or too often can interfere with your brain, heart, liver, and immune system’s ability to work properly, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

- **Brain:** Drinking can lead to mood and behavioral changes and disrupt communication pathways, making it harder to concentrate and coordinate.
- **Heart:** Too much alcohol can damage the heart, causing issues like high blood pressure, stroke, and cardiomyopathy.
- **Liver:** The heavier you drink, the more likely you are to develop liver diseases like fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis, fibrosis, and cirrhosis.
- **Pancreas:** Drinking often or in high amounts can increase the risk of developing pancreatitis. This is an inflammation of the pancreas that can be very painful and lead to digestive problems.
- **Immune system:** Chronic drinkers are more likely to get sick because of a weakened immune system. This can make them more susceptible to serious illnesses like pneumonia.
- **Cancer:** Alcohol can cause multiple types of cancers, according to the National Cancer Institute. This includes liver cancer, head and neck cancer, breast cancer, colon cancer, and esophageal cancer.



Short-term effects of drinking

Even casually drinking within the recommended limits can cause short-term effects on the body and mind, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

The liver can metabolize about one drink per hour. But age, weight, and liver function all can influence what the body can handle.

In the hours after consuming more than one alcoholic beverage in an hour, you may experience a range of symptoms from mild to severe, including:

- Skin flushing.
- Poor social judgment and lower inhibitions.
- Loss of critical thinking skills and concentration.
- Loss of physical coordination and clear vision, leading to possible injury or worse.
- Behavioral changes and mood swings.
- Reduced body temperature.
- Higher blood pressure.
- Vomiting.
- Passing out, blacking out, or losing consciousness.
- Alcohol poisoning that requires medical attention.

Long-term effects of drinking

Drinking heavily and often can lead to long-term damage to the body and mind, including liver damage and cardiovascular disease. Even drinking one alcoholic beverage a day can slightly increase your risk of some cancers. Other risks are:

- Memory loss or trouble concentrating, even when not actively drinking.
- Learning problems.
- High blood pressure.
- Liver fibrosis.
- Alcoholic hepatitis.
- Cancers of the throat, mouth, liver, colon, and esophagus.
- Weakened immune system.
- Mental health issues like depression and anxiety.
- Family and job-related problems.
- Alcohol dependence.





Warning Signs of Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcohol misuse and alcohol use disorder — or excessive daily consumption — put a person at increased risk of health and social consequences, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Close to 70% of survey respondents 18 years and older reported drinking alcohol in 2019, and 55% said they drank in the past month.

Some signs that you have developed, or may be developing, an alcohol use disorder include:

- You feel like you need alcohol to function, and you're having trouble stopping.
- You can't stop drinking once you start.
- Your social life, professional life, or personal life are suffering due to your alcohol use.
- Others are telling you that you have a misuse problem.
- You've lost interest in hobbies or relationships that don't involve drinking.
- You're hiding how much you drink from loved ones.
- You're engaging in risky behaviors like drunk driving.
- You can't cut back on drinking even though you want to.
- Your behavior and personality have changed due to your drinking.
- You're regularly embarrassing yourself or resorting to physical violence when drinking.
- You've developed a higher tolerance for alcohol or experienced withdrawal symptoms like cravings, shaking, and sweating when abstaining from alcohol.
- You're in legal or financial trouble because of your drinking.

These signs may underscore a more serious problem and could require the help of a skilled professional. Remember, alcohol use disorder is a chronic disease touching millions throughout the United States.

How to Cut Back on Drinking and Keep Your Social Life

Reducing your alcohol intake can be challenging in a society heavily focused on casual drinking (think happy hours, cocktail parties, and bar crawls). But there are a number of ways to cut back without being overwhelmed.

Set personal goals: Create your own limits on alcohol consumption, whether that's drinks per week or per month. Then, tell yourself where and when you will choose to drink. This could be big pre-planned events, like a friend's celebration or family wedding, or a broader boundary. Let your loved ones know so they can help hold you accountable. You can also set a few "off-limit" days each week during which you won't drink at all.

Budget: Tell yourself how much money you're willing to spend on alcoholic drinks and stick to it.

One day at a time: Phase in your new drinking habits slowly to ensure success. Always stay hydrated!

Scale down: Reduce your portion sizes when you do drink, and choose beverages with lower alcohol contents.

Have fun: Plan events and outings that don't involve drinking, like hiking, shopping, coffee dates, or movies. Surround yourself with friends who drink less. Learn mocktail recipes you can sip at parties so you don't feel left out.

Know what to say: When acquaintances ask why you're not drinking, know how you'll respond to avoid uncomfortable interactions. This could be anything from, "I have an early day tomorrow," to, "I'm trying to cut back," to, "Not right now, thanks."



All the fun, None of the Booze!

Tasty Mocktail Recipes to Try



Mango Mule

What you'll need:

- 5 cucumber slices
- 1 ounce honey syrup
- 1.5 ounces mango puree
- 1.5 ounces lime juice
- 1.5 ounces ginger beer
- Ice

How you'll do it:

Gently mash the cucumber slices with honey syrup in the bottom of a shaker. Mix in the mango puree and lime juice. Shake with ice and strain into a copper mug before stirring in ginger beer.



Virgin Margarita

What you'll need:

- 1/2 cup limeade
- 1/4 cup lemon-flavored sparkling water
- 1/4 cup lime-flavored sparkling water
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- Ice
- Salt and lime to garnish

How you'll do it:

Mix limeade, sparkling water, and orange juice into a pitcher and mix. You can add flavor by blending in strawberries, peaches, or even jalapenos. Rim a glass with salt and fill it with ice. Pour pitcher blend over ice and garnish with lime.



Arnold Palmer

What you'll need:

- 1/4 cup lemonade
- 1/2 cup iced tea of your choice
- Ice
- Lemon slice for garnish

How you'll do it:

Stir the lemonade and iced tea together into a tall glass, and serve with lemon garnish.



Virgin Sangria

What you'll need:

- 5 lemon slices
- 5 lime slices
- 5 orange slices
- 2 cups cranberry juice
- 2 cups grape juice
- 1 cup orange juice
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 4 cups sparkling water or lemon-lime soda

How you'll do it:

Add the lemon slices, lime slices, and orange slices to a large pitcher. Add cranberry juice, grape juice, orange juice, and lemon juice, and stir. Refrigerate pitcher until ready to serve. Once ready to serve, add sparkling water or lemon-lime soda and mix well.



Mai Tai Mocktail Punch

What you'll need:

- 1 liter orange juice
- 1 liter pineapple juice
- 1/2 cup lime juice
- 1/2 cup almond syrup
- 1/2 cup grenadine
- 1 liter sparkling water
- Garnish options:
oranges, limes, cherries
- Ice



How you'll do it:

Mix orange juice, pineapple juice, lime juice, and almond syrup into a pitcher and refrigerate until ready to serve. Put ice in a glass and pour the mix over, adding a splash of grenadine and stirring in seltzer water. You can also pour it into a large mixing bowl for parties. Add garnish as desired.

Mint Mojito

What you'll need:

- 15 mint leaves
- 1 ounce lime juice
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup
- 4 ounces club soda
- 1 lime
- Ice



How you'll do it:

Muddle mint leaves, lime juice, and simple syrup at the bottom of a glass. Add ice and top with club soda. Stir, garnish with lime wedges, and enjoy.

Virgin Mary

What you'll need:

- 8 ounces tomato juice
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- 2 drops of hot pepper sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- Fresh ground black pepper



- Toppings as desired (celery, olives, pickles, etc.)
- Ice
- Celery salt
- Kosher salt
- Old Bay seasoning
- Black pepper
- Lemon pepper

How you'll do it:

Rim your glass with seasoning, rubbing a lemon wedge around it to moisten. Fill a glass with ice, then fill half of a shaker with ice. Add tomato juice, lemon juice, lime juice, Worcestershire sauce, and black pepper to the shaker. Cover and shake for 15 seconds, then pour into glass. Add toppings as desired.