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# Your Habit- Changing Plan

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**WHEN PEOPLE SUCCESSFULLY CHANGE THEIR HABITS, THEY USUALLY FOLLOW A SIMPLE PLAN. THIS IS YOUR PLAN TO FOLLOW FOR CHANGING YOUR HABITS.**

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This information is not only for people who have drinking problems or are addicted to alcohol; it's also for the non-dependent user or people who are not addicted to alcohol but are still drinking enough to cause health risks. It can help both those who have drinking problems and those who want to prevent future problems. The emphasis is on changing behaviors and preventing future problems, be they health, social or legal.

## LOW-RISK, MODERATE DRINKING

Low-risk drinking involves limiting alcohol use to amounts and patterns that are unlikely to cause harm to oneself or others. Evidence indicates the risk of harm increases significantly when you consume more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women, more than five days per week. Even smaller amounts of alcohol present risks in certain circumstances. Following these low-risk and moderate drinking guidelines can reduce the risk to your health and the possibility you might hurt someone else.

- Have no more than two drinks of alcohol per day (for men)
- Have no more than one drink per day (for women)
- Drink no more than five days per week
- Do not use any alcohol when you drive or operate machinery
- Never drink when you are pregnant or breast-feeding

The specific amount that is safe is different for men and women, because women metabolize alcohol differently.

The recommended maximum drinking guidelines established by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Addiction are—

**Women: 3 drinks per day, 7 per week**

**Men: 4 drinks per day, 14 per week**

Low-risk drinking limits are based upon standard measure of alcohol. Most bottles of beer have the same amount of alcohol as a glass of wine or one shot of liquor or distilled spirits. When you think about how much you drink, be sure to count standard drinks. A standard drink in the U.S. is any drink that contains 14 grams of pure alcohol.



NIAAA

**One drink = 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. wine, 1 ½ oz. liquor**

If you have been drinking above these limits, you risk causing harm to yourself and others. Having three or more drinks on one occasion creates the risks of “accidents” involving injuries, problems in relationships and at work, and medical problems. Drinking more than two drinks per day over extended periods can cause health problems as well as depression and increased chance of alcohol dependence.

## HOW YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR DRINKING HABITS

Most people can stop or reduce their drinking if they decide to do so and work hard at changing their drinking habits. When people successfully change their habits, they usually follow a simple plan. The information provided here will help you create a sensible plan. If possible, try to enlist someone to help you...a friend or relative, a healthcare provider or member of your religious community who would be willing to help you work out a plan and stick to it. The reason for getting somebody else to help is simply that two heads are better than one. Also, they will be able to provide support. Share the information here with the person who commits to supporting you in your behavior change.

Another way of using the information in this brochure is to get together with one or two other people who also want to change their drinking habits.

Some people change their habits without help from others. If you are unable to find someone to support you during this time, you can work out a plan by yourself.

First ask yourself the following questions:

- How will I benefit if I cut down on my drinking?
- How will my life improve?

## REASONS FOR DRINKING LESS

Based upon recent research on the effects of alcohol, there are a number of benefits to cutting down on your drinking.

Choose three from the this list that seem to be the best reasons for you—that make you want to cut down on your drinking.

- I will live longer—between five and ten years
- I will sleep better
- I will be happier
- I will save a lot of money
- My relationships will improve
- I will stay younger longer
- I will achieve more in my life
- There will be a greater chance that I will survive to a healthy old age without premature damage to my brain
- I will be better at my job
- I will find it easier to stay slim, since alcoholic beverages contribute to weight gain
- I will be less likely to feel depressed and six times less likely to commit suicide
- I will be less likely to die of heart disease or cancer
- The possibility that I will die in a fire or by drowning will be greatly reduced
- Other people will respect me
- I will be less likely to get into trouble with the police
- The possibility that I will die of liver disease will be dramatically reduced
- I will be three times less likely to die in a car accident
- (men) My sexual performance will probably improve
- (women): There will be less chance that I will have an unplanned pregnancy
- (women): There will less chance that I will damage my unborn child

When you have chosen three good reasons for cutting down on your drinking, make a note of them at the back of this brochure in **YOUR HABIT-CHANGING PLAN**

Now you should have a clearer picture in your mind of exactly what you expect to happen if you continue to drink heavily and a clearer picture of your future if you stop drinking or drink at moderate levels.

## **HIGH-RISK SITUATIONS**

Your desire to drink heavily probably changes according to your moods, the people you are with, and whether or not alcohol is readily available.

Think about the last time you drank too much and try to work out what contributed to your drinking. What situations will make you want to drink heavily in the future? Here are some examples.

- A situation in which other people are drinking and I am expected to drink as well
- Feeling bored and depressed, especially on weekends.
- After a family argument
- When drinking with my friends
- When feeling lonely at home
- When I am in a social situation and feel nervous

**Use the following list to help you identify four situations in which you are most likely to drink too much.**

- Parties
- Festivals
- Family
- Bars
- Mood
- After work
- Arguments
- Criticism
- Feelings of failure
- Particular people
- Tension
- Feeling lonely
- Dinner parties
- Boredom
- Sleeplessness
- Weekends
- After receiving paycheck
- When others are drinking

When you have chosen the four dangerous situations or moods that give you the most trouble, write them down in **YOUR HABIT-CHANGING PLAN**. The next task is to work out ways of dealing with these situations without drinking more than the recommended limits.

## HOW TO STICK WITH YOUR PLAN

How can I make sure I don't drink too much? If I'm tempted to, how can I stop myself? Not easy questions to answer.

You may find it helps to have another person to through the following steps with you.

- Choose one of your four high-risk situations
- Brainstorm different ways of avoiding or coping with it
- Select two of these ways
- Write them down in **YOUR HABIT-CHANGING PLAN**

Here is an example of one person's attempt to cope with his challenge of not drinking more than he intends.

### **Challenge**

Drinking with friends after work.

### **Ideas**

- Limit the number of days go out with friends after work
- Have only two drinks when drinking
- Switch to non-alcoholic beverages after two drinks
- Change friends
- Work later
- Go home rather than drinking
- Find another activity

### **The two solutions that work best**

- Limit the number of days go out with friends after work
- Switch to non-alcoholic beverages after two drinks

Notice that some of the ideas probably would not work. That doesn't matter when brainstorming ideas. Think of as many as you can and then decide which ones are the most likely to work for you. When you have selected two ways of coping, move onto the next high-risk situation so you come up with ideas of coping with each of the four high-risk situations.

The next area of your life that you should think about is your relationship with other people. If you can increase the number of times each week that you enjoy being with others without drinking above moderate limits, then you will not need to use alcohol as much.

One point to remember is that most of us need other people. We need to socialize. And one of the best ways of encouraging yourself to drink at low-risk levels is by having friends who drink within low-risk limits. You will increase your chances of making new social contacts if you put yourself in situations where you meet new people. The next task that you should set for yourself is to think of ways of putting yourself in such situations. Use the brainstorming method, and then choose two that are most likely to work for you. Here is an example of the challenge, brainstorming of ideas, and selection of two workable solutions.

### **Challenge**

Put myself in situations where I will be involved with other people who drink within moderate limits.

### **Ideas**

- Join a club (health, social, etc.)
- Help with religious activities or at the community center
- Help out at my child's school or youth club
- Join a volunteer organization
- Invite people over
- Visit relatives more often

### **Two solutions that work best**

- Join a health club
- Help out with my child's school

Record the two ways you choose in **YOUR HABIT-CHANGING PLAN.**

## DO YOU DRINK BECAUSE YOU ARE BORED?

Many people do. If boredom contributes to your drinking beyond low-risk limits, your task in this section is to think of as many activities as you can that might hold your interest and then select two of them to try. Use the following questions to help produce this list.

- What types of things, such as sports, crafts, languages, etc., have you enjoyed learning in the past?
- What types of trips (to the mountains or the country, etc.) have you enjoyed?
- What types of things, such as painting, dancing, etc., do you think you could enjoy if you had no worries about failing?
- What have you enjoyed doing alone (long walks, playing an instrument, sewing)?
- What have you enjoyed doing with others (talking on the telephone, playing games)?
- What have you enjoyed doing that costs no money (playing with your children, going to the library, reading)?
- What have you enjoyed doing that costs very little?
- What activities have you enjoyed at different times (different times of the day, on your day off, during the spring or autumn, etc.)?

Choose two activities (joining a community group and exercising regularly, for example) that will work best for you and record them in **YOUR HABIT-CHANGING PLAN**.

## ABOUT DEPRESSION

Many people drink because they are depressed. Depression is characterized by feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities and decreased energy. Other symptoms include loss of confidence and self-esteem, inappropriate guilt, thoughts of death and suicide, diminished concentration and disturbance of sleep and appetite.

If you have felt depressed for two weeks or more, get help from your healthcare provider. Treatment does help. During treatment for depression, you should stop drinking, as alcohol is a depressant drug that will delay your response to treatment.

## THE MASTER PLAN

Complete and save the section of **YOUR HABIT-CHANGING PLAN**. This will be your master plan for the next few weeks. Go over your plan each day, so you don't forget about it, especially when you are faced with a tempting situation. Here is the best way of insuring that you keep your plan in mind.

- Think of an activity that you do several times every day, such as drinking a cup of coffee or washing your hands.
- Whenever you carry out that activity, very quickly go over your plan in your mind. Think about **YOUR HABIT-CHANGING PLAN** reasons for cutting down, dangerous situations and ways of coping with them. Also think of your plans for meeting other people and beginning interesting activities.
- If you have a support person, talk about your plan and progress every day in the beginning and then several times a week as you have success sticking to it.
- If your plan is clear in your mind, it will help you to change. If it is only on paper, it will have no effect at all.

### Here are a few other tips

- Remember that every time you are tempted to drink too much and are able to resist, you are changing your habit.
- Whenever you feel very uncomfortable, distressed or miserable, keep telling yourself that it will pass. If you crave a drink, pretend that the craving is like a sore throat that you have to put up with until it goes away.
- If you have a helper or support person, tell that person honestly how much you had to drink each day and when you have been successful or have drunk too much.
- It is likely that you will have some bad days on which you drink too much. When that happens, don't give in. Remember that people who have learned to drink at moderate levels had many bad days before they were finally successful. It will get easier with time.

## GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT

The goals of this publication are to find good reasons for drinking less and also to identify other activities to substitute for drinking. It is sometimes easier to think about suggestions and work out a plan for changing habits with the help of someone else. That is why we have encouraged people who are using this material to ask someone else to go through it with them. If you are someone who is willing to help in this way, you might find the following points useful.

- The suggestions in this brochure have been created with two types of drinkers in mind. Some are already having problems with drinking and want to change. Others are drinking smaller amounts of alcohol that put them at risk of developing problems and of health consequences. They have been advised to decrease the amount that they drink to lessen health risks and in order to prevent future problems. Prevention is better than cure.
- Changing habits is sometimes difficult, but you can help in two ways. First, you can help with the exercises provided here and second, you can provide encouragement and support.
- Try not to criticize the person you are helping even if you get annoyed and frustrated with his or her behavior. Remember that changing behavior is never easy. There are bound to be both good weeks and bad weeks. Your positive encouragement, support of moderate drinking or abstinence and creative ideas can make all the difference.

Source: Babor, Thomas and Higgins-Biddle, John. 2001. Brief Intervention Manual. The World Health Organization, Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence.

# Your Habit-Changing Plan

## Reasons for cutting down or stopping drinking

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Dangerous situation 1

\_\_\_\_\_

## Ways of coping:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Dangerous situation 2

\_\_\_\_\_

## Ways of coping:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Dangerous situation 3**

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**Ways of coping:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Dangerous situation 4**

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**Ways of coping:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Ways of meeting others who don't drink or do so within low-risk limits**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Ways of avoiding boredom to try**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**How to remember your plan**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_