

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO DRINKING LESS

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WELCOME

I'm going to venture a guess that long before you picked up this guide, a quiet voice inside of you paused to question your drinking. Maybe you watched the person across the table from you nurse their glass of wine and wondered why you drink so much faster. Perhaps you did a double-take at the bottles in your recycle bin and thought, "*Did we really drink that much this week?*" Or you can't figure out how a friend, after years of imbibing, suddenly cut back with apparent ease.

Having worked with thousands of people, I can tell you that this quiet voice is much more common than you probably imagine. However, most people feel incredibly alone when they start to question their drinking. Because of this, it can take months or even years before a person feels ready to acknowledge, act on, or talk about their concerns. During this time, you may find that your attempts at change don't work for very long or you may notice that you're ultimately drinking more, not less.

Why is it so hard to take action as soon as that little voice starts to question your drinking? For starters, society offers very little nuance when it comes to discussing struggles with alcohol. The mainstream approach can be summed up as follows: if you can't control your drinking, you're an alcoholic, and if you're an alcoholic, the only solution is to commit to lifelong abstinence.

This one-size-fits-all approach is based on the teachings of Alcoholics Anonymous, a group created in the 1930s by Christian evangelists as a solution for the "spiritual disease" of extreme alcohol abuse. AA's teachings—including an insistence on labeling people, a requirement to confess your sins, and the need to surrender to a higher power—are so universally accepted as the *only* solution for anyone who struggles with their drinking that many people end up ignoring their early intuition that something is off rather than having to head down this prescribed path.

Drinking too much is *not* a "spiritual disease," and hardcore drinkers aren't the only people who need help with alcohol. In reality, only 10-15% of people who struggle with their drinking fall into the category of severe alcohol abuse. That leaves a whopping 85-90% of people who struggle with nowhere to turn and who, despite their vast numbers, continue to be overlooked by medical professionals and researchers.

The result is that too many people are left to fend for themselves when their intuition tells them that something about their drinking feels off. With little to go on, they're likely to rely on rules, willpower, and avoidance in order to say no, only to find that these tactics are usually hit-or-miss. And the more their attempts at change fail, the more likely these people are to fall into a cycle of blame, shame, and fear. Believing they should "know better" by now or be more disciplined. Perhaps you can relate?

Much like any behavior that can start to feel compulsive (eating, social media, shopping, etc.), drinking less is not about developing an iron will. Instead, it requires educating yourself on common-sense practices that help make success more likely, developing and honing your self-awareness, and building self-control through repetition and practice. This guide will show you how to do all these things by teaching you how to approach your cravings differently and how to work with your unique Drink Archetypes.

In the following pages, I offer an approach to drinking less that examines alcohol use from a place of curiosity and non-judgment. I do not claim this is the only or the best solution for everyone. In fact, I believe society as a whole would benefit from having more varied approaches to alcohol education, use, and abuse.

My greatest hope is that this guide will offer you a new way to understand your drinking and be an invaluable resource on your journey to finding a solution that works for you. Having worked with so many different people on their drinking, I've seen the power of the human mind to learn, grow, and evolve—no matter how old you are—and I believe wholeheartedly in your ability to create lasting change, even if prior attempts haven't worked.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

In order to drink less, you must focus on the three building blocks of change: education, self-awareness, and self-control. Having a shaky foundation in these areas is not your fault.

Your official education on alcohol likely began and ended in health class, where your teacher warned you of the dangers associated with underage drinking. If you learned about the brain, it was probably during a brief unit in biology class. Your readings likely centered on the brain's role and function in the body rather than the practical steps needed to harness its power to change your life.

Your instruction on how to develop self-awareness was probably non-existent. Perhaps you've heard the quote, "Know thyself," but how exactly are you supposed to figure out who you are? Certainly, your inner critic has a lot of opinions about you, most of which you'd rather tune out. Most people have little interest in getting acquainted with their feelings, especially if you were ever told your emotional experience was too big, illogical, or a sign of weakness. And then there are your needs and desires. Perhaps you're an expert at shoving those aside or believing they are wrong. It's no wonder your self-awareness is cloudy at best or that your drinking can, at times, feel like a mystery.

And then there's self-control. When it comes to impulsive and compulsive behaviors, your self-control probably feels fragmented or unreliable. Perhaps you are disciplined in certain areas of your life, but temptation strikes and it's almost like you become someone else. Or maybe you're a superstar at following through on your commitments to others but crumble when it comes to the commitments you make to yourself. When it comes to temptation, you've been led to believe that it's simply a matter of willpower, but in truth, discipline is only a small part of developing more self-control.

This guide will help you work on these building blocks of change so that you can make decisions around alcohol that are aligned with your goals and who you want to be. Change is possible, but it will not happen in a straight line. As you do this work, you will encounter obstacles and setbacks. At times, you may feel frustrated, confused, and overwhelmed. This is a normal and unavoidable part of the learning process, and you will discover how to keep taking action rather than allowing these moments to sideline your efforts.

There is no “right” way to work with this guide. You may read it cover to cover or flip through to the sections and exercises that seem most relevant to your situation. The key to mastery is figuring out how to weave these exercises into your life and keep practicing.

When it comes to physical fitness, most people understand that change doesn't happen overnight. But when it comes to matters of the mind, the assumption is totally different: *I should know better. If something makes sense intellectually, I should be able to implement it right away.* This is a trap. A theoretical understanding of a subject is not the same as having a useable skill. You must work with these exercises regularly in order to develop the skill of drinking less.

Some of the most important skills you'll practice will first appear to have little to do with alcohol or drinking less. Don't be fooled. Unwanted behaviors can come with a lot of shame and blame. You will learn how to spot something I call the denial, rescue, and blame trap. When something you try doesn't work, you'll be tempted to turn away from what happened, believe that you can't find the solution, or insist on shaming yourself.

Denial, rescue, and blame will prevent you from developing the self-awareness you will need to create the self-control that you desire. This is why so much of your work centers on practicing self-respect, self-concern, and self-compassion. After all, you can't hate yourself into a healthy, peaceful relationship with alcohol, and a healthy, peaceful relationship with alcohol is the foundation of learning how to drink less.

STEP 1: EDUCATE YOURSELF ON THE BASICS

Part 1 of this guide will give you the education you never got in school. You can think of this section as the “CliffNotes” or primers for everything you need to understand about alcohol, the brain, desire, cravings, what drives your behaviors, and how to change them. It's important that you familiarize yourself with this information before diving into the exercises.

Although you've had lots of experience drinking, alcohol may still feel like a mystery. You may wonder why sometimes a certain number of drinks feels like no big deal, and other times, it sends you over the edge. *Alcohol 101* covers standard servings and the factors that impact your level of intoxication. The next section, *The Brain, Desire & Cravings*, will help you understand why you may feel at odds with yourself when it comes to alcohol or why you continue to repeat behaviors that you know aren't good for you.

If you've ever woken up and thought, *Why did I drink so much?*, the section on *The Think-Feel-Act Cycle* will give you a framework to uncover what's actually happening so you can make sense of your drinking. So many factors outside your control influence your drinking, but this section shows you the one area where you can learn to wield tremendous power.

From there, you'll learn about *The Drink Archetypes*. The archetypes are not about labeling problematic drinking; instead, they illuminate the various ways that the human brain has learned to use alcohol. Identifying which of the eight Drink Archetypes most often show up for you will help you discover what's really getting in the way of saying no.

Finally, I'll teach you about the difference between knowledge and know-how and why this matters when it comes to changing behaviors. *The Process of Change* outlines the mindset you need in order to reach your goal and will show you how to come up with a compelling reason to keep you motivated. In *Deciding on a Relationship*, you'll learn about the four overlooked areas that will help you figure out what you want your drinking to look like. I don't believe there is one "right" path for every person, and it's up to you to decide how much and how often you want to drink.

STEP 2: REVIEW AND IMPLEMENT THE BEST PRACTICES

Part 2 is about learning to use best practices that will help set you up for success on your journey. The exercises in this section are useful for everyone, no matter which Drink Archetype is activated. You'll find the best practices organized into four categories: *The Foundation*, *When You're Drinking*, *When You're Not Drinking*, and *After Drinking Too Much*. I recommend reading through Part 2 in its entirety to familiarize yourself with the exercises.

Your goal of drinking less requires a willingness to practice staying present while you're consuming alcohol rather than checking out and letting your lower brain run the show. The notion that you can stay conscious while drinking might strain credibility, but it is possible, as I will explain. Exercise #1: *Name & Notice* will outline how this is done. The goal is to develop a curious, non-judgmental approach to your cravings. Doing this will allow you to tap into the wisdom of your cravings using Exercise #2: *Ask & Listen*. These first two exercises in the guide create the foundation on which all other practices build.

Best Practices When You're Drinking will help you avoid impulsive decisions, stock up on items to help you drink less, and educate yourself on common sense (but often overlooked) practices that will help you drink responsibly. You'll also start tuning into the

enjoyment that you get from drinking, which can help you consume more mindfully. You may be surprised to discover how your assumptions about enjoyment can actually disconnect you from the experience of pleasure.

Best Practices When You're Not Drinking sets the stage for saying no without turning it into an exercise in gritting your teeth. You'll discover a smarter way to choose non-alcoholic drinks, learn how to check in with your physical and emotional needs, and lay the foundation for emotional resilience. These exercises reinforce the importance of noticing and changing how you relate to yourself.

Finally, *Best Practices After Drinking Too Much* will ensure you aren't derailed when your attempts to drink less don't work. You'll learn how to properly take care of your mind and body after a hangover, how to avoid the denial, rescue, and blame trap, and how to examine what happened from the perspective of an observer so that you can better prepare for the future.

Your goal is to make the best practices second nature. At a minimum, you'll want to focus on consistently practicing the exercises that will increase your self-awareness: *Name & Notice* (#1), *Ask & Listen* (#2), *HHALT Check-Ins* (#12), and *Name & Normalize Emotions* (#13). Keep in mind that self-awareness is a precursor for self-control, but that this is not a transformation that happens overnight. You *will* stumble. When this happens, make sure you don't skip over the practices that will help you reset and keep going.

STEP 3: WORK WITH YOUR DRINK ARCHETYPES

Understanding how to work with your unique Drink Archetypes is the key to lasting change. Instead of relying on rules, willpower, or avoidance to say no, you're going right to the source: what your brain has learned from alcohol.

Before starting to work with the archetypes, you must first understand how they work. Read through the summaries for all eight archetypes, paying particular attention to your primary and secondary archetypes. (Haven't taken the quiz? Visit drinktype.com and get your free results.) If, after reading through the summaries, you resonate with an archetype that is different from your results, trust your gut and start there. Remember, this work is about building your self-awareness and learning to follow your intuition.

Each archetype has specific exercises that will help you go beyond what you learned in the best practices so that you can work on a tailored approach to your unique situation. The archetypes' exercises have different labels. Those labeled "Drinking" and are best used in situations when you choose to consume alcohol. Others labeled "Not Drinking" are best used when you're practicing saying no. Exercises without a label are more fluid and can be used in a variety of situations.

Note that the exercises in this section can work for multiple archetypes. Each exercise outlines which archetypes it is best for, and you can find a complete list of exercises for each archetype at the end of this guide.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long will it take before I start drinking less?

You developed a relationship with alcohol over many years, perhaps even decades. You can change, but it will take time to unlearn your associations with alcohol and teach your brain something new. Please don't let this deter you. Change happens faster than you think. The speed at which you see progress is more about consistency than anything else.

Consistency is not about being perfect; it's about showing up even when things don't go as anticipated. You must diligently use the exercises in *Best Practices After Drinking Too Much* to avoid the denial, rescue, and blame trap (Exercise #18) and learn from what didn't work (Exercise #19).

The biggest factor slowing progress is the decision to give up on the work because you've decided that failure is an indication that something is wrong with you or that change is impossible. You want to avoid lots of starts and stops or approaching the process haphazardly; otherwise, your transformation will take much longer.

With that in mind, here are some guidelines for how long it takes to see changes:

- Most people experience less shame and hopelessness after reading through The Basics and summaries for each Drink Archetype. Having a framework to explain your drinking, especially when it can, at times, feel illogical, is often a huge relief. Shame and hopelessness can stall your efforts at change, and reducing this at the outset can help jumpstart your progress and motivation.

- After four to six weeks of consistently practicing exercises that increase your self-awareness, in particular *Name & Notice* (#1), *Ask & Listen* (#2), *HHALT Check-Ins* (#12), and *Name & Normalize Emotions* (#13), most people see a dramatic change in the relationship with their cravings and their understanding of their desire to drink.
- After four to six months of consistently using the exercises and working with your archetypes, most people notice a significant reduction in their drinking. You might not be exactly where you want to be, but you will likely find it much easier to pause, question, and say no.

What if, during this process, I decide to take some time off from drinking?

This is very normal, and it's important to listen to your intuition. When working with the Drink Archetypes, you may discover that you want to devote more time and energy toward an overlooked piece of the puzzle (e.g., one of your deeper desires) rather than focusing so much of your attention on drinking less. For example, you may want to find more enjoyment outside of drinking, discover your purpose, or simply learn to believe that you're enough exactly as you are.

Taking time off from drinking can help you focus your mental (and physical) energy on these larger goals. Many of the exercises in the guide are designed to be used regardless of whether or not you're drinking, so you can keep doing the work even if you decide to take time off from alcohol.

What if my newfound self-awareness is too much for me to handle?

If you discover that you're drinking to avoid dealing with parts of your life, you may feel overwhelmed when you have more awareness about certain thoughts, feelings, or memories. In the event that you discover unresolved trauma, intrusive or harmful thoughts, or feelings that are unresponsive to these tools, please get outside support.

While this guide teaches thought work and mindfulness, these tools are in no way superior or "better" than other forms of support for your mental health and well-being (e.g., therapy, medication, or other types of individualized care). My hope is that tools such as the Think-Feel-Act cycle make it easier to seek out additional avenues of support or understand why you're trying to go it alone instead of getting the help you need.

In the short term, several exercises can help you bridge the gap when you're in crisis:

- Exercise #12: *HHALT Check-Ins*
- Exercise #13: *Name & Normalize Emotions*
- Exercise #15: *Building the Muscle of Self-Compassion*
- Exercise #47: *Stop Trying to Figure Out the Future*
- Exercise #48: *Reframe Why You Keep Revisiting the Past*
- Exercise #49: *Challenging Black-and-White Thinking*
- Exercise #56: *Challenging Compare and Despair*
- Exercise #63: *Make a "F**k It" Plan*
- Exercise #67: *Whose Voice Is This?*

You are worthy and deserving of support. Please don't delay in getting the help you need.

Can I use this guide to reintroduce alcohol after a long period of not drinking?

Yes! However, please first explore the Drink Archetypes to understand which archetype(s) may be behind this desire. Some people successfully use rules, willpower, or avoidance to abstain from alcohol for long periods without realizing that they haven't done the work to change the associations their brain has with alcohol.

For example, if you avoid social situations (*The Mask*), feel like you're at the kids' table when you're not drinking (*The Upgrade*), or find yourself disconnected from friends and loved ones (*The Connector*), reintroducing alcohol isn't going to fix these problems and can strengthen the underlying archetype.

Furthermore, if you're trying to "prove" that you can drink so that you can feel "normal" or reintroducing alcohol to rebel against a person or part of your life (*The Release*), please know that your relationship with alcohol needs attention, and that's perfectly normal. Make sure you work with your archetypes before reintroducing alcohol.