**Updated Covid messaging**

Many people in Scotland have changed the way they drink alcohol over the past year. As lockdown restrictions ease, and the vaccine rollout continues, you might be beginning to question your own drinking and whether you need to make any changes.

Changes in drinking habits in Scotland are happening in two directions:

* Over a quarter of people in Scotland reported that they have been drinking more than usual during lockdown.
* 13% of people reported drinking less.

**How do I know if I am drinking too much?**

Many people aren’t aware of how much alcohol they drink and whether it could be causing them harm. The amount we drink can also creep up over time without us realising.

The UK Chief Medical Officers’ advice on drinking for adults aged 18 and over is:

* Drink no more than 14 units a week to keep your health risks from alcohol low.
* Try to spread your drinking evenly over 3 or more days.
* Try to have several drink-free days each week.

Whatever your situation, keeping track of your drinking is even more important now than usual. Understanding why you drink, being aware of [how many units](https://www.count14.scot/#unit-calculator) you are drinking and the ways to [reduce risks](https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol/the-risks-of-drinking-too-much) to your health and wellbeing can help you to make informed choices.

If you're reading this article, there's a good chance that your recent drinking habits have given you pause for thought. If you find you are drinking regularly, to cope with difficulties, or to avoid feeling bad, it could be a sign that you should take steps to address your drinking.

**I’ve been drinking more during lockdown, what can I do?**

Many people who reported drinking more during lockdown said that they were concerned about it. If you are worried then there are a range of things you can do to help manage your drinking: [**Tips on cutting down your drinking**](https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol/tips-on-cutting-down)

Stress is identified as a key factor for many people who increased their drinking during lockdown. Unfortunately, these stresses aren’t necessarily going to go away with the easing of covid restrictions. Many people are worried about going back to offices, socialising, or using public transport. Some may not have a job to return to, creating additional uncertainty at an already difficult time. It may be tempting to have a drink to “take the edge off” our worries but alcohol is a depressant that can make it more difficult to deal with stress. There are a range of better ways to help manage stress and feel calm: <https://clearyourhead.scot/>

As restrictions ease, you may be in more regular contact with friends, family and work colleagues. This may make you anxious about other people becoming aware of your drinking. However, confiding in someone can help if you’re going through difficult times or worried about your relationship with alcohol. It can also be incredibly helpful to allow family and friends to support you as you cut down or give up drinking. Employers have a legal responsibility to look after employees’ wellbeing, health and safety, and your employer might be able to offer support too.

If you are drinking at high levels, you could be physically dependent on alcohol. This means your body might react negatively if you stop drinking alcohol. In severe cases alcohol withdrawal can cause:

* Seizures (fits) even if you have not had one before;
* Hallucinations (seeing, hearing or feeling things that aren’t there);
* Confusion (about where you are, what time it is, who you are with);
* Poor coordination and unsteadiness on your feet.

But you can still take steps to control your drinking. Speak to a GP who will be able to get help for you to reduce your drinking safely.

**I’m worried about returning to old habits, what should I do?**

Some people used lockdown as an opportunity to reduce their drinking or stop altogether. However, as life begins to return to normal, you might be concerned that you will begin to increase your drinking. You should consider the reasons why you decided to cut down or stop, and what may tempt you drink alcohol in future.

You may have reduced your drinking because you became aware that you were using alcohol as an unhealthy coping mechanism. Therefore, it could be useful to reflect on other ways you learned to deal with negative emotions during the lockdown, and consider whether there is anything else that could also be useful: <https://clearyourhead.scot/>

You may have used lockdowns as an opportunity improve your health and wellbeing, including by reducing your drinking, and potentially also making other lifestyle changes. It could therefore be useful to focus on any benefits you have noticed e.g., better sleep, improved concentration, more energy. As things return to something more like normal, taking up a new sport or hobby, joining a gym, or signing up to a sports or fitness group, could help keep you motivated.

You may have found it easier to reduce your drinking due to the closure of pubs and lack of socialising. Alcohol is sometimes described as a social lubricant, but it can actually make it harder to participate in a meaningful conversation and increase social anxiety in the longer-term. You may find it helpful to try to spend time with people who won’t pressure you to drink or to go to places where drinking isn’t expected.

**Should I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I am drinking?**

Yes. The most important thing is to get the vaccine as soon as you are offered it. If you are a heavy drinker it’s particularly important to get the vaccine as your immune system may be affected by your drinking. There is no evidence that drinking alcohol interferes with the Covid-19 vaccines. However, you should not be intoxicated when you arrive for your Covid-19 vaccine appointment as you have to be able to give your consent. You may wish to avoid binge drinking and alcohol use around the time of your vaccination for general health.

**I’m worried about someone else’s drinking**

If you are concerned about someone else’s drinking, it can be stressful and disruptive to your health and everyday life. They may not recognise they have a problem with their drinking, which can cause frustration and distress. You may be supporting a loved one on your own and have no one to turn to or to talk about what is happening. It’s easy to focus more on your loved one and not realise that you need support too.

Support is here and available for you. The Scottish Families Helpline supports anyone who is concerned about a loved one’s substance use, and we can provide you with advice and information. We can also link you into further support, including options in your own area. Visit Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs to find out more [www.sfad.org.uk](http://www.sfad.org.uk).

**Where can I get support?**

As we all continue to socially distance ourselves, some organisations and groups have started to offer support online or by phone.

* [We are with you](https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/) is a UK-wide agency that helps individuals, families and communities to manage the effects of alcohol and other drugs. They provide free, confidential information and advice and a webchat service. Speak to trained alcohol and drug workers online via the [We Are With You website](https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/) or by phone: Tel: 0300 123 1110 (Weekdays, 10am-4pm, 6pm-9pm) (Weekends, 11am-4pm)
* [Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/) provide free self-help groups across Scotland and online. Its 12-step programme involves getting sober with the help of regular support groups. National helpline number: 0800 917 7650. [Find online meetings](https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/AA-Meetings/Find-a-Meeting/online)
* [Breaking Free Online](https://www.breakingfreeonline.com/) Evidence based programme that is now free during Covid-19 crisis.
* [Sure Recovery App](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/depts/addictions/research/measures/sureapp/index) The app includes an information page on Covid-19 and an option for people to record their experiences of substance use, treatment, and other aspects of their lives during Covid-19 and this period of social isolation.
* [Smart Recovery Online meetings](https://smartrecovery.org.uk/) - SMART Recovery helps individuals recover from any addictive behaviour and lead meaningful & satisfying lives; using a science-based therapeutic programme of training.
* Many people with problems with alcohol may find other networks useful, including Narcotics Anonymous (NA) <https://ukna.org/covid19> and Cocaine Anonymous (CA) <https://cocaineanonymous.org.uk/>
* [Alcohol Focus Scotland National Service Directory](https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/alcohol-information/find-an-alcohol-service/) Find an alcohol service near you.

**Worried about someone else’s drinking? Support for friends and family members**

* [Al-Anon Family Groups](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk/) offer support and understanding to families and friends of people who are dependent on alcohol. Helpline: 0800 0086 811
  + Al-Anon is offering online and phone meetings <https://al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings/electronic-meetings/>
* [Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs](http://www.sfad.org.uk) Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs supports anyone concerned about someone else’s alcohol or drug use in Scotland. They have a number of local and national Family Support Services including a Helpline, Bereavement Support, one to one support and Local Family Support Services. There’s also a range of resources available on their website.

Helpline: 08080 10 10 11 – helpline@sfad.org.uk

[www.sfad.org.uk](http://www.sfad.org.uk)

**Additional support**

* [Childline](https://www.childline.org.uk/) 0800 1111
* [Women’s Aid Scotland](https://womensaid.scot/) 0800 027 1234
* [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](https://sdafmh.org.uk) 0800 027 1234

[Carers Scotland](https://www.carersuk.org/scotland) 0808 808 7777

**Suggested social media content**

**Message 1 – general**

Many people have changed the way they drink alcohol over the past year. As restrictions ease, you might be questioning your own drinking, and whether you should make any changes. To find out more visit <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/alcohol-information/alcohol-and-covid19/>

**Message 2 – keeping track**

Many people aren’t aware of how much alcohol they drink and that it could be causing them harm. The amount we drink can also creep up without us realising. Keeping track of your drinking is even more important now than usual. Find out more at <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/alcohol-information/alcohol-and-covid19/>

**Message 3 – drinking more**

Many people who reported drinking more during lockdown say that they felt concerned about it. If you are worried then there are a range of things you can do to help manage your drinking: [**Tips on cutting down your drinking**](https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol/tips-on-cutting-down)

**Message 4 – stress**

Stress is identified as a key factor for many people who have been drinking more during lockdown. Unfortunately, these stresses aren’t necessarily going to go away with the easing of restrictions. For tips on how to manage stress and feel calm: <https://clearyourhead.scot/>

**Message 5 – cut down/stopped**

If you used lockdown as an opportunity to reduce your drinking or stop altogether, you might be concerned that you will begin to fall into old habits. For tips visit <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol/tips-on-cutting-down>

**Message 6 - vaccination**

No matter how much alcohol you drink, it is recommended that you get the Covid-19 vaccine as soon as you are offered it. However, you should not be intoxicated when you arrive for your appointment so you can give your consent. See <https://www.nhsinform.scot/covid-19-vaccine> for more info

**Message 7 – support**

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic support is available. Don’t wait to ask for help, visit NHS Inform for details [https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol/where-to-get-help 9](https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol/where-to-get-help%209)