



# Alcohol use

## Finding balance

Many university students like to enjoy a social drink. Alcohol is often associated with good times, and when used responsibly, can be a part of a healthy lifestyle. Of course, alcohol use can become problematic. It can be associated with some unwanted side effects such as feeling hung-over and tired, or more serious problems can arise. So how do you know if your alcohol use has become out of balance?



## When is a problem a problem?

**Have you been thinking about whether your alcohol use is having a negative impact on your life?** There are a number of signs that indicate that alcohol has gotten out of balance and become a problem. For some people, they might have gotten a little out of balance – where the costs of alcohol use are outweighing the benefits. For others, more serious problems may have arisen.

Here are some signs that often indicate alcohol has become a problem:

- Missing work, university or other commitments because of alcohol use
- Simply spending more time than you'd like being hung over or feeling scattered
- Having conflicts with others when you are drinking, or about your drinking
- Getting in trouble with the law due to alcohol use (e.g. drink driving)
- People saying you have a problem with alcohol (e.g. your friend, partner, family member)

- Needing to drink more each time to get the same effect
- Losing control over the amount that you drink
- Trying to cut down on alcohol use, but not being able to
- Drinking at an earlier time in the day to what you normally would

**What level of risk are you at?** There are online quizzes to give you an indication of the level of risk associated with your alcohol use:

*<http://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/Alcohol-Your-Health/Risk-Assessment-Tool>*

**Interested in finding more about the health impact of alcohol and other drugs?** Further info available on these web pages –

**Ontrack:** [www.ontrack.org.au/web/ontrack/resources/fact-sheets/alcohol-and-your-health](http://www.ontrack.org.au/web/ontrack/resources/fact-sheets/alcohol-and-your-health)

**Alcohol Think Again:** <http://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/>

**Reachout:** <http://au.reachout.com/tough-times/alcohol-and-other-drugs>

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## What can I do about it?

**Getting ready to make changes.** First, write a list of all the benefits and all the costs of drinking. Spend some time thinking about the positives and negatives of alcohol use. This list can be helpful to keep you motivated.

You may decide to change your alcohol use. Perhaps you want to reduce the amount you drink to avoid some of the unwanted consequences of a big night out. Or perhaps you want to make some broader changes to your general health.

It is often helpful to set yourself some goals with a plan to make changes. Usually, people have a greater chance of success when they set small, achievable goals. Decide what it is that you'd like to change and then decide how you'd like to do this.

For example: *"I'd like to reduce my alcohol use to only twice per week"*

You may like to speak to a friend to clarify your goals. Or come and speak to the counselling staff about setting goals, and strategies for making changes.

**Actually making changes.** Sometimes making change is easier said than done. Below are some tips to help you on your way. Keep in mind that talking over things with a professional may be the way to go, if you decide that you need some support.

- Take a few non-alcoholic drinks with you to parties so that you can easily space out your alcoholic drinks.
- Try to drink slowly. Small glasses can help.
- Choose drinks with a lower alcohol content.
- Choose activities that don't centre on alcohol use such as: going to the movies, taking a dance class, rock climbing, or attending the theatre. Develop some new interests!
- Spend time with people who drink less.
- Reward yourself by spending the money you usually spend on drinking, on other things you enjoy.

**Maintaining your new lifestyle.** When you are in the phase of maintaining change, you may have started to notice some benefits of reducing alcohol use. Take note of these benefits by keeping a list, or speaking to others about what you're now enjoying about life. For example, you may be really enjoying the mornings on the weekend to go kayaking. Or you may start liking the look of your holiday-savings bank account.

Be prepared for some set-backs when it comes to making changes. People will often take two steps forward and one step backwards when it comes to making any change to their health habits.

Consider what will be your most challenging times. Perhaps Friday nights as you're getting into weekend-mode? Or craving for a drink after a really stressful day? Whatever your triggers are, get to know them, anticipate them, and prepare yourself with a plan.

## Other resources

Check out our the websites listed above or speak to your GP about alcohol use. Alternatively, you may like to drop in and see one of our friendly psychologists at the counselling service.

## Where are we?

The main Counselling centre is at the South Street Campus on Bush Court. We also have some counselling available at Peel.

### Email for all campuses:

[counsellingservice@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:counsellingservice@murdoch.edu.au)

### South Street Campus

Social Sciences Building 440 (Bush Court)

Phone: (08) 9360 1227

Hours: 8.30am – 4.30pm

### Peel Campus Student Centre

Phone: (08) 9582 5501

Hours: 8.30am – 4.30pm