

## How to Cut Back Drinking This Summer

*By MindWise Innovations*

For many, summer is a time to cut loose and indulge a bit. Unfortunately, this makes the summer months a risky period for those worried about or struggling with their alcohol use.

Billboards, magazine ads, and television commercials are plastered with images of joyful-looking people on beaches and in backyards with cold beers or frozen alcoholic drinks in their hands. Summer barbecues, family cook-outs, and all-inclusive vacations are all events where drinking is traditionally expected or even encouraged. The long days and short nights of summer further add to the likelihood that someone could lose track of their alcohol use.

Drinking in the summer also presents extra health challenges. Dehydration is a greater risk than at other times of the year. Not only does alcohol increase your body's rate of becoming dehydrated, its effects can be amplified by time spent in the hot sun. Many warm-weather activities pose additional danger from accidents while under the influence of drugs or alcohol: swimming, boating, grilling, and driving in new locations.

If your drinking increases in the summer, it's also important to remember that alcohol use has an impact on your behavioral health. An individual dependent on alcohol is up to six times more likely to develop a behavioral health issue such as depression or bipolar disorder.

If you're thinking to alter your drinking habits this summer, try some of these tips to cut back or cut out alcohol.

## To cut out alcohol entirely:

Find a different way to cope with stress. When you have a bad day or something stressful is weighing on you, try talking to a friend about it, exercising, or finding a creative outlet rather than reaching for a drink.

Avoid situations that are triggers for you. If you have friends with whom you usually go to a bar, invite them out for coffee instead.

Don't keep alcohol in your house, even if you live with others who still drink. Ask them to support you in your mission to get healthier.

## To cut back on drinking:

Set a goal for yourself and record how many drinks you have each week. You can do this on your phone if you want to be more discreet about it.

Space your drinks by having a non-alcoholic drink between alcoholic ones. This will keep you more hydrated and may help you feel less conspicuous around others who may be drinking more than you.

Choose alcohol-free days, and stick to it. You can even pick a reward to look forward to after meeting your goal – just make sure the reward isn't a drink!

If you can't seem to cut back or cut out alcohol, it might be time to seek out professional help. If you think that you or a loved one might have a substance use or other behavioral health disorder, take a free online screening to get insight at [www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/MIIAWELLNESS](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/MIIAWELLNESS).

