



**Changing your  
drinking in  
hospitality and  
the drinks  
industry**



# Changing your drinking in hospitality and the drinks industry

Working in hospitality or the drinks industry, you'll know how challenging it can be to change your personal relationship with alcohol. When you're around alcohol professionally, it can be hard to say no to a drink. And drinking together is an important part of many workplace cultures, inside and outside the industry.

But if you want to reevaluate your drinking habits, you're not alone. Club Soda and The Drinks Trust are here to help you change your drinking, your way.

This booklet includes information on:

- Changing your drinking with a Club Soda course
- Drinking in the drinks industry
- Looking after yourself
- Inspiring stories



Changing your drinking

## Changing your drinking

Changing your drinking habits can take time, and you shouldn't expect to get everything right from day one. If you could do this, you would have done it already. So when you are thinking about your drinking, approach the endeavour with an attitude of learning and exploration.

Club Soda's courses are designed to give you the skills and confidence to change your drinking habits.

Our two flagship courses - How to Stop Drinking and How to Drink Mindfully - are designed so that you can work through at your own pace. They are filled with in-depth information, tools, reflections, real-world experiments and regular check-ins so you can see your progress.

You'll get daily motivational nudges by email every morning for as long as you need them. Plus, we use private messaging to keep in touch with everyone doing our courses, so you can chat with others who are cutting down, taking breaks or quitting. We're in this together.

In Club Soda we will never tell you how to change. Whether you want to cut down or take a break from drinking, we will support you either way.

If you've got this booklet, you can access one of Club Soda's courses fully funded by The Drinks Trust. So don't forget to sign up. Use the coupon code **drinkstrust** at the checkout to get your course completely free of charge.





Drinking in the drinks industry

## Drinking in the drinks industry

The pandemic has changed everything.

When venues shut, the hospitality and drinks industries faced a unique and maybe existential challenge. Nobody knew for sure if pubs, bars and restaurants would be able to open safely again, and some businesses have not survived.

On a personal level, you might have been unable to go to work, or lost your job. In whatever way your working life was disrupted, these enforced breaks from the routine of working can be difficult to deal with. You may have considered leaving the industry altogether. And so your future may feel especially uncertain right now.

But if you have struggled with drinking at work, the pandemic might give you time to make some personal changes. You can grow in confidence as a mindful drinker even with all the uncertainty of the world changing around you. If you can take advantage of the fact that the world is in flux, you'll be better able to deal with the challenges of being back at work when life returns to something like normal.

Club Soda's courses are designed to give you all the skills and confidence you need to become a mindful drinker, whatever your future holds.

## Drinking and your working life

Many of us legitimise our drinking behaviours because of our work. We have to taste to be an expert. Or we have to drink when entertaining guests.

For many people in the industry, work plays a big role in shaping our drinking habits. In turn, this can have an impact on our personal lives.

When you are at work, you might struggle with things like nutrition, keeping on top of stuff at home, making time for yourself or getting quality sleep. As we invite you to make small changes, you may like to focus on little shifts in behaviour that will improve these areas of your life.

You are not alone in changing your drinking. Many of your friends, co-workers and future customers may be quietly curious about this too. So taking a Club Soda course is an opportunity to have a positive impact not only for yourself now, but also for those around you at work. Your non-drinking customers will be so happy to find someone behind the bar who is ready to serve them something interesting without judgement.

If you are in a working environment that doesn't seem to support a more mindful attitude towards drinking, don't despair. Signing up for a course with Club Soda could open up opportunities to change the conversation in your workplace and to shift the culture.

## Being an alcohol expert

Sometimes, what we choose to drink is influenced by a fear of missing out or not being up to date within our industry. If one brewery releases a limited-edition collaboration with another brewery, we may – as industry experts – feel compelled to buy a bottle. Notice whether this is out of a genuine desire to taste, or whether you feel this is more about the social currency of being one of the first to get your hands on it. Perhaps you want to keep up to speed, or maybe you want to post about it on social media.

When exploring these ideas, remember to be kind to yourself, so don't give yourself a hard time. Consider whether the style of the drink genuinely interests you, whether it satisfies a true desire to taste or whether choosing that drink is born out of the fear of missing out. You could always gather a group of enthusiasts and share these things, so you aren't committing to an entire serve yourself. Or even experiment with not trying them at all. Notice how that makes you feel. Did you lose anything in not trying it? It is likely that the world will still be turning.

And if you find that actually what you want to drink (alcoholic or not) is something your peers may judge you for, try to move past that. Don't allow your area of expertise to define your identity within your industry. It is your character that defines you, not your drinking.



## Tackling triggers for work drinking

Whatever part of the hospitality or drinks industry you work in, you will have access to alcohol in a way that most people don't.

For some people, and in some workplaces, this isn't a problem. But it's not unusual to find some aspect of your workplace triggering, or to feel worried about being surrounded by alcohol at work.

But it's useful to take a forensic look at your triggers and worries to identify exactly what the issues are. You will almost certainly be able to find easy and practical fixes to most of these problems, if you approach them with a clear head.

Other people working in hospitality and the drinks industry who found some aspect of their workplaces triggering have dealt with it. Some have worked hard to move into management positions, where serving alcohol is a smaller part of their day. Others have made sideways moves into events, food or hotels. Some have found new jobs in workplaces with less coercive drinking cultures.

We can't say what might work for you, but we can say this: You've got options, and lots of them could be great for your career.

## Understanding 0.5% ABV

Even if you've worked with alcohol for years, labelling can be confusing. To help you give good advice to your customers in due course, and so you can work out what you want to drink for yourself, here's a refresher on what 0.5% ABV means in practice.

Saying that a drink contains 0.5% alcohol by volume means that it is 99.5% water and other non-alcoholic ingredients. Labelling regulations are complex and vary in different countries, but in many parts of the world 0.5% drinks are labelled as alcohol-free.

Drinks containing up to 0.5% cannot make you drunk. They are therefore safe for people who are avoiding alcohol, such as drivers. However quickly you drink them, your body can process the trace amount of alcohol in these drinks before it has any effect on you.

Alcohol is a naturally occurring substance, and many foods contain as much alcohol as alcohol-free drinks. Ripe banana smoothies, soy sauce and even brown bread might be regularly on your menu, but all of them have some alcohol content. So 0.5% drinks should be a concern.

That said, some people find the flavour and consistency of AF drinks triggering. But ultimately, the only way to know what works for you is to experiment and to pay attention to what happens.



Looking after yourself

## Looking after yourself

Right now, your wellbeing has never been more important.

But the circumstances of life can make it difficult to look after yourself.

There are many upsides to working in hospitality and the drinks industry, but you might also experience anxiety, disrupted eating habits, increased stress and a sleep cycle that is all over the place because of shift working.

If you need more support, you may also be eligible for other wellness services offered by The Drinks Trust. Check out their website for information about talking therapies, help with sleep and other practical support.

## Coping with anxiety

Most of us worry. Feelings of unease and uncertainty are a normal part of life, but anxiety can be challenging to cope with if it holds us back from living well.

At the beginning of lockdown, we surveyed Club Soda members. Anxiety emerged as the number one issue that people were struggling with. The uncertainty we are continuing to live with provokes uncomfortable and worrying feelings for many people. If your troubles are getting the better of you, you're not alone.

Drinking is, at best, a quick and dirty fix to anxiety. If alcohol cushions you from the worry of relating to other people, you'll know how hard dutch courage is to control (one drink = winning, four = hot mess). And there is nothing worse than a hangover accompanied by the anxiety that you don't remember what happened the night before.

## Alcohol, anxiety and your brain

Alcohol has complex effects on the brain, but the basics are relatively simple to understand. As well as being a depressant (meaning that it has sedating and soothing effects), alcohol is also a stimulant. Some of those stimulants give you happy feelings. But others induce feelings of anxiety. Drinking provokes the release of adrenaline and cortisol into your system, raising your heart rate, giving you sweaty palms and a dry mouth.

Those stress hormones are still in your system the next morning, and drinking on top of them makes them worse. Some of the anxiety you feel with a hangover is the comedown from alcohol. Having another drink to feel better just delays the process of your brain rebalancing itself.

Anxiety drinking can become a downward spiral, but you can stop it by taking a break.

## Top tips for tackling anxiety

As you change your drinking by cutting down or stopping altogether, you still may be left with some feelings of anxiety. How can you find calm without reaching for a drink? Here are six simple tips:

- Begin to accept anxiety as part of life, and tell yourself that it's OK to be uncertain and unsure.
- Remember that there are some things you can control, a few things you can influence, and many things you can do nothing about. Focus on what you can control.
- Prioritise good food and getting enough sleep. If you are looking after yourself, you will increase your resilience to deal with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.
- Talk to others about what's worrying you. Be as specific as you can be. Supportive friends can help you put your anxiety into perspective.
- Anxiety can be paralysing, so notice if you've stopped moving. Get out of your head and into



your body. Stand up, stretch and stamp your feet. If you can spend some time walking outside, this will help too.

- If anxiety comes at you from nowhere, a useful grounding technique is to notice what's around you. Out loud, name five things that you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can feel (like the shoes on your feet, not your emotions), two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.

## Eating better

We do not eat well when we are drunk. Alcohol simultaneously increases our appetite and decreases our ability to make good food choices.

As you change your drinking, you might notice the troubled nature of your relationship with food. Add in at home snacking (well, someone has to eat all the cakes you baked in lockdown) and you may feel like your food choices are out of control right now.

## Alcohol and your weight

Gram for gram, alcohol is one of the most energy-dense substances you can consume. So as you change your drinking, you might expect to lose weight. And in fact, weight-loss might be one of your motivators for change.

Sadly, there's no quick fix. You put on drinking weight slowly, so you shouldn't expect it to disappear overnight. And as you get to grips with your drinking, you may find your appetite fluctuates too. Sugar cravings are common, especially if you stop drinking altogether. Remember that you don't have to change everything at once – tackling your sugar consumption is something you can do when you're ready.

Rather than depriving yourself through dieting, focus on foods that nourish you and make you happy. Alcohol depletes your system of vital vitamins and minerals, so a balanced and nutritious diet will help you flourish. And

bear in mind that numbers on the bathroom scales aren't as important as how you feel in your skin. In an image-obsessed society, it's a radical act to love yourself just as you are.

## Top tips for eating well

Happily, the skills you learn as a mindful drinker – paying attention to habits and cravings, making plans and acting with intention – can help you reshape your relationship with food. Here are our top tips for becoming a mindful eater:

- Learn to listen to your body. It's easy to confuse hunger with tiredness or boredom. Have a nap or find something to do rather than reaching for a snack.
- Bring your awareness with you as you sit down at the table. Eliminate distractions when you eat so you can savour the flavour of the food in front of you.
- Be curious about what you are eating, using all your senses to enjoy your food.
- Eat slowly enough that you can begin to notice when you are reaching the point when you are full.
- Focus on your food with gratitude. Thinking about where your food comes from slows you down, so you can appreciate and find pleasure in what you are eating.
- Avoid using food as a way to punish yourself (through deprivation) or reward yourself (as a treat). Try and remember that food is just food,

but be kind to yourself if your eating does not go to plan.

- Pay attention to your cravings for alcohol and how these relate to your feelings of hunger for food.

## Dealing with stress

There are many reasons you could be feeling stressed right now. If you've been stuck at home worried about your job, juggling childcare and homeschooling, you may be under a lot of pressure. But sitting with time on your hands can – strangely – be stressful too. Some people seem to have enjoyed the peace and quiet of lockdown; others of us, not so much. And the world opening up again can be stressful too.

Even though you may be experiencing greater levels of stress right now, it's useful to recognise that stress is a normal part of life. The key issue is how resilient you are.

Stress can provoke big feelings too like anger, sadness and fear. Acknowledging and accepting those can help to defuse the tension that comes along with stress.

Alcohol does work as a short-term stress reliever. But the negative consequences of drinking more than you want to can end up making stress worse. Having different strategies to handle stressful situations can help you live well.

## Stress in relationships

A common worry for people in relationships who are cutting down or going alcohol-free is what to do about a partner who continues to drink. Particularly if drinking is a big part of your relationship, changing your drinking

can feel stressful and complicated. But don't let this hold you back from making the changes that are right for you.

Many Club Soda members have faced this situation and made it work. Start an honest conversation with your partner about what you are doing and ask for their support. Make the conversation about your drinking – not theirs – and reassure them that you want to continue to spend time together. Your partner might be curious about changing their drinking too, but they might not, and that's OK.

If drinking together is a big part of your relationship, remember that you don't have to drink the same thing. Choose alcohol-free drinks you'll love. And if it helps you, ask them to choose something that they enjoy, but you don't, to make it less likely you'll want to share.

## Top tips for handling stress

Although changing your drinking will reduce your stress levels, life isn't going to become stress-free. These are our top tips for handling stress:

- Be active. Exercise won't change the sources of your stress, but it will help reduce some of the emotional intensity you might be feeling.
- Ask yourself, "what can I do?" You can't fix everything overnight, but you can take a small, positive step in the right direction.
- Give yourself time to relax and practise self-care. If you're living at a high level of stress, it takes



time to calm down. Listen to music, light a candle, run a bath.

- Remove unwanted stressors from your life. Constantly browsing social media or compulsive watching the news could be adding to your stress levels, so remember to disconnect every now and again.
- Help other people. Stress can turn you inwards and leave you feeling powerless, but supporting someone else can help put your problems into perspective.
- Adopt an attitude of gratitude. Find three things that you are grateful for each day and name them out loud.

## Sleeping well

The coronavirus pandemic seems to be changing our sleeping patterns. Some people are reporting sleeping longer and having more vivid dreams, especially in lockdown. Perhaps we are collectively making up our collective sleep deficit?

But, as with everything else, the changes aren't positive for everyone. Some of us are struggling to get a good night's sleep, prompted by increased levels of anxiety and stress. And sometimes, sleep is just elusive, for no particular reason at all.

Changing your drinking can have a positive impact on your ability to get a good night's sleep. Alcohol disrupts your body's natural rhythms, so cutting down or quitting can mean that you sleep better and snore less. But especially if you have relied on a nightcap to get you to sleep at night, changing your drinking can leave you sleepless in the short-term.

Of all the things you can do to support your wellbeing, sleep tops the list. Being rested and refreshed gives you the resources to tackle many of life's challenges, including any difficulties you might face as you change your drinking.

## Drinking dreams

Drinking dreams are pretty common, and nothing to worry about, even if they happen years after you've

changed! Whatever occurs in your dream, be reassured that it isn't an omen that you're about to fall off the wagon.

That said, having a drinking dream might be a nudge to pay attention to what's going on in your inner world, particularly if it makes you aware of cravings.

Some people find it helpful to write about dreams. Others like to shake them off in the morning. But whatever you do, don't let them bother you.

## Top tips for improved sleep

None of our advice on sleep is revolutionary or surprising, just a reminder of what you may already know. Here are our top tips for a good night's sleep:

- Set regular times for going to bed. Good sleep hygiene is one of the keys to great sleep.
- If you're at home more than normal, it's tempting for your routine to slip sideways, so you become more nocturnal. Keep to a regular schedule for waking up, and prioritise getting some sunlight to reset your body clock each morning.
- Watch your caffeine and sugar intake. If you are looking for alcohol-free alternatives, alcohol-free beers and wines are good low-sugar and caffeine-free options for evening drinking.
- Have a digital sunset before bedtime. Avoiding news and social media for a few hours before bed will reduce your anxiety levels. And avoiding

bright screens before bedtime allows your body to produce melatonin, an essential sleep hormone.

- Take a warm bath. This helps prepare your body for sleep, and it can reduce your stress levels.
- If you're prone to anxiety, write a to-do list for the next day before bed, so you don't keep yourself awake worrying.
- Keep your bedroom dark, tidy, quiet, and cool.
- Most of all, let sleep happen. You can trust your body and mind to fall asleep if you give them the chance.



Inspiring stories

## Zanna's story

Zanna has managed bars for almost ten years, so long days and stress have always been a part of her working life. But last year, she found she was drinking more than she wanted to.

“I had some personal problems that contributed to an increase in drinking,” she admits. “I found solace in drinking, and that was usually around work because there are people you know who are also drinking a fair bit. I’m aware that I’ve always been slightly on the wrong side of indulgence.”

For Zanna, changing her drinking started with paying attention.

“At the start of the year, I did what everyone does. I started monitoring my drinking and looking at ways of taking it more seriously. Because of that, it feels as though something has shifted. I think it’s because I took the time to be more mindful and pay attention.

“I’ve realised there will always be a reason to drink if I want one. So I take time to think and decide whether I really do want to drink today. I have nights where I will have one drink, and then just water or something else alcohol-free. Some nights I will have a few drinks, although those are becoming rarer.

“Negative language isn’t helpful, so telling myself I’ve made a mistake or done something wrong doesn’t help



me. So I try to ask questions instead, and assess the causes and effects so I can do better next time.”

Paying attention to her drinking hasn't made stress disappear at work, so Zanna is finding new ways to relax.

“If I started my shift in the afternoon, within an hour I might be imagining winding down with a drink after close,” she admits, “so I’m reframing what relaxing at the end of my day looks like. I find time for things I enjoy like cooking or projects I’ve always had in mind. That in itself is a reward – instead of having a drink after work I can make progress in an important area of my life.”

Paying attention to her drinking has also helped Zanna get perspective in other areas of her life too.

“I’m finding it easier to treat my job as a job now. I treat it more professionally, so I finish a shift and go home. I’ve taken on some financial commitments too, so I’m conscious that drinking feels like money down the drain. Previously, I’d have thought nothing of spending £30 on a round of drinks, but I’m becoming more aware of my finances, and that’s motivating.”

## Anja's story

It might be surprising that someone who works for Club Soda should also work for breweries running tours and tastings, but that balance works for Anja.

“I juggle a career in beer and alcohol-free,” she says, “and I aim to make sure I am defined by my passions, not just my career or my beer knowledge. I’ve stepped back from full-time customer-facing roles, and I work with a couple of breweries, doing tours and tastings.”

Her unusual mixture of jobs also means that Anja spends a lot of time thinking about drinking and not drinking, and this has had a personal impact.

“Life was chaotic in the past. I was so depressed and tired that I couldn’t think straight, make decisions or focus. And although drinking wasn’t the root cause of that, it was certainly a symptom. Even though I wasn’t getting drunk often, I still felt that regular drinking was having a damaging effect on me.

“I’ve been exploring that for a while now. I take extended breaks from drinking, the longest being about three and a half months.”

Changing her personal drinking has had an impact on her drinking at work.

“I push myself to do industry things without drinking. That is daunting, but I plan ahead and make sure I have something decent to drink. Previously, I would always

drink along with customers when doing tastings, but now I sometimes don't or just have a few sips."

Anja's personal approach to drinking is governed by her increasing awareness of her moods.

"I drink more when I am sad or stressed," she admits, "so my number one rule is absolutely no alcohol if I am feeling that way. I consciously never drink enough to experience even a hint of a hangover, and I honestly can't remember the last time I had one. For me, the measure of my drinking success is how I feel day-to-day."

Changing her drinking is also changing her view of herself.

"It's key to me that drinking does not define my character," she says. "I don't want people to credit how fun I am to whether or not I am drinking. I was tired of alcohol being part of my identity, of being known only for my job. So I aim to make sure that people know me for the things I love and spend my time doing."

"Stepping back from the industry hype was scary, but I know now that it doesn't matter. The bubble looks so much smaller once you've stepped out and got some perspective. I'm living a much more fulfilling life now, and I credit that almost entirely to adjust my drinking behaviour."

## Tom's story

Working in a bar can make moderation hard because alcohol is always available. For Tom, the secret of his success has been shifting his focus away from drinking towards something else entirely.

“Having something in your life that helps keep you on track is a great way of ensuring alcohol isn't the main focus. For me, that is exercise, trying to keep fit and feeling good. I exercise a lot and that's something that always centres me. It's a way to shake off stress and shut out the working day.”

Having a social life continues to be important to Tom, and he's discovered that he can socialise through keeping fit as well as by drinking.

“There's so much exercise you can do that's based on classes,” Tom says, “so it gives me a chance to have that social time three or four times a week, without the pressure to go out and meet at the pub.”

But how about social situations that do centre around alcohol?

“I went to a family gathering at a pub recently,” comments Tom. “It was a bottomless red wine and roast dinner thing. I lied and said I don't like red wine, and ordered a cocktail with an alcohol-free spirit in it. I stuck to that all day. Nobody knew until the bill came.”

That decision to spend time alcohol-free with family and friends hasn't been easy though. "My brother always wants me to drink with him," says Tom. "It's frustrating. But I just keep telling him that it's becoming more common for people to think about their drinking and cut down. I stick to my guns."

Knowing first-hand the challenges that moderators can face, Tom is pleased that his workplace is changing.

"There are people around me who will pressure me, who question me if I'm not drinking. It bothers me because if the shoe were on the other foot, I really wouldn't care. I'd just let them get on with it. I'm still participating, I'm just not drinking alcohol.

"We've expanded our alcohol-free range recently, and that's good for me as well as for our customers. I always look for good alcohol-free options to pace myself. There should be more choice in our bars, and people can always be there for something other than drinking."

## Sean's story

Sean has worked in the industry for 10 years. Having started out as an apprentice, he's worked his way up through the ranks to become a sous chef at one of the best restaurants in his city. Drinking had always been part of his working life, but three years ago, it started to become a real issue.

"The stress of the job was getting to me," Sean admits. "It'd be a beer or two after every shift to take the edge off."

Drinking became a crutch, and then something more. Sean started experiencing seizures and ended up in the hospital being treated for alcohol withdrawal. Following his treatment, he managed 100 days alcohol-free before his drinking began again.

"It snowballed," he says. "I was back into those old habits. I think I was lucky because I was still able to notice what was happening, that things were getting bad again. It made me self-destructive and I knew it had to change."

Quitting drinking ten months ago has changed Sean's perspective at work.

"Everything revolves around drink; it's such a big part of the culture at our place. We sell lots of specialist beer and natural wine, but our alcohol-free options are rubbish.



Half the staff are always hungover on shift too, and I find that very frustrating.”

Despite working in a drinking culture, Sean has learned to thrive by taking care of his physical health.

“Occasionally I’ll still crave a beer after work, but I know I won’t have one. I’ll have an alcohol-free beer if I am unwinding with the team, but sometimes I’ll just leave work straight away. That’s important.

“When I was drinking my mood was always bad and my energy was low. My passion for work dwindled and I was getting fat. Since quitting, I’ve started running as a way of managing stress.

“My energy levels are through the roof. I’m training towards a marathon and that’s really giving me focus. I notice my body now, I feel things. I’m not numb any more.”

And how is work going since he quit drinking?

“I’m more productive now, and I’m better at my job. The cooking skill was always there, but I wasn’t as good with the team. I’m a better manager now because I’m calm and measured. I love cheffing, but I don’t know if I’m in this for the rest of my life. I find myself thinking about nutrition and how we care for our bodies through food. Maybe I’ll head in that direction in the future.”

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