



Harm Reduction advice for people who use Alcohol

This advice is important during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. If you are drinking heavily, you are at increased risk of the health impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19). You may want to cut down or stop drinking to help improve your immunity, or because your supply of alcohol is running out.

If you are dependent on alcohol, stopping drinking suddenly could kill you.

Self-isolation may lead some people to drink more alcohol than usual. If you are worried about your drinking levels increasing, you can contact LiveWell Dorset to talk about how to reduce the amount of alcohol you are drinking. Call 0800 840 1628 or 01305 233 105 or visit www.livewelldorset.co.uk.

If you experience withdrawal symptoms such as shaking, sweating, nausea or headache after several hours without a drink, please do not stop drinking suddenly as these signs mean that you are likely to be physiologically dependent and you will go into alcohol withdrawal.

Alcohol withdrawal can be fatal and has serious complications if undertaken without medication - like seizures (fits), confusion, hallucinations, problems with co-ordination and unsteadiness on your feet.

Emergency departments are still open 24/7 for serious conditions and injuries. Phone NHS 111 if you're not sure what support you need, or call 999 for anything life threatening as normal

Some withdrawal symptoms (such as sweating) are like symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19) so be aware of this. Please visit <https://111.nhs.uk/service/COVID-19/> if you have Coronavirus symptoms and self-isolate if you have a new cough and or temperature. Do not go to your GP, hospital or pharmacy.

Self-detoxing alcohol at home without medical support isn't advised. There is far too much uncertainty in the alcohol detox process, including the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal that should never be underestimated.

We would advise anyone who is alcohol dependent to seek professional help.

Local alcohol treatment services are open and can provide further advice and support:

- Dorset including Christchurch (REACH): 0800 043 4656
- Bournemouth (We Are With You – formerly Addaction): 01202 558855
- Poole (EDAS/SMART): 01202 735777

Gradual alcohol self-reduction at home:

Even if you are dependent on alcohol, you can cut down and gain some control of your drinking by treating alcohol as a medicine. What this means is spacing out your drinks to manage withdrawal symptoms. Try to space out your drinks, particularly in the middle of the day while keeping your drinking at the start and the end stable.

Keep a drinking diary; write down each drink you have when you have it and find out how many units it has in it. Start measuring your drinks if you are drinking from a bottle. Unit calculators can be found online such as www.drinkaware.co.uk/understand-your-drinking/unit-calculator.

Once you have stabilised your daily intake for one week (the lowest amount of alcohol that holds off uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms) you can start to cut down slowly. It is generally safe to reduce by a small amount (no more than 10%) approximately every 5-7 days (or slower) once any discomfort from the previous reduction has passed, until you are alcohol free.

Wellbeing advice during alcohol self-reduction at home:

Sleep: You will find your sleep is disturbed. You may wake up several times during the night, and may suffer heavy nocturnal sweats, or may have problems getting to sleep. This is to be expected, and your sleep pattern should return to normal within a month.

Anxiety and sleep: Try downloading Mindfulness or meditations apps, (Headspace and Calm are great), and you will also find lots on YouTube.

Fluids: Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids to stay hydrated, this is very important as the body will lose lots of fluids through perspiration. Avoid drinking large amounts of caffeinated drinks, including tea and coffee, because they can make your sleep problems worse and cause feelings of anxiety. Water, squash or fruit juice are better choices.

Food: Eat little and often, even if you have no appetite, attempt to make yourself eat small amounts regularly to give you more strength and energy.

Multi vitamins and Minerals: If you believe you are dependent on alcohol, you may need Thiamine (vitamin B1), talk to your GP about this. You could supplement Thiamine with an over the counter Multivitamin complex, for example Sanatogen one tablet daily.

Stress: Reducing your alcohol intake can be very stressful, so attempt activities to divert thoughts from frustration/cravings etc, such as crosswords, Sudoku's, adult colouring, playing music, reading, taking baths, separating yourself into a different room away from annoyances.

Support: Ask other people to help you and look out for you. Tell the people you live with that if you experience a seizure, become confused, start to see or hear things which others cannot hear, develop double vision or become unsteady on your feet, they should call an ambulance.

Contact your local alcohol treatment service for professional support and how to access support from people who have similar experiences (peer support).

Other help:

- Drinkline is the national alcohol helpline - Call 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 9am to 8pm, weekends 11am to 4pm).
- <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help-now/coronavirus-information-and-advice-hub>
- Drinkaware - <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-support-services/>
- Freephone Alcoholics Anonymous tel:08009177650 – <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/> Online meetings <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/AA-Meetings/Find-a-Meeting/online>
- Freephone Samaritans 116 123 www.samaritans.org
- Freephone 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline - 0808 2000 247 <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>
- Connection – a 24/7 mental health helpline open to all ages. Dorset residents or people visiting Dorset can call direct on 0300 123 5440 or access via NHS 111.
- The Silver Line – free helpline for older people - 0800 470 80 90
- Corona virus helpline for vulnerable people – BCP area; Call 0300 123 7052, Dorset area; call 01305 221000. Both services available 8am to 8pm, seven days a week.
- Treatment services (numbers listed on front page) are also available to support family members and carers.
- NACOA (National Association of Children of Alcoholics) <https://www.nacoa.org.uk/> freephone 0800 358 3456
- Childline - 0800 1111 <https://www.childline.org.uk/>
- Al-Anon – support for people affected by someone else's drinking freephone 0800 0086 811 <https://www.al-anonuk.org.uk/>