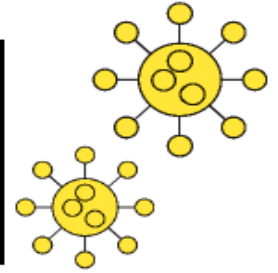


# NZDF COVID-19 ALCOHOL USE & LOCKDOWN



In these unusual and difficult times, it's normal for people to feel stressed, anxious, bored and/or lonely, and it's tempting for some people to turn to alcohol to relieve those feelings. But there are healthier ways of coping with the challenges we currently face.

## Why do we sometimes drink more in times like these?

Our current lockdown situation has naturally created more stress for people for a variety of reasons. People who are stressed or anxious may drink more than people who aren't. But although alcohol initially helps us relax, after drinking we can feel even more anxious as our brain tries to find its natural chemical balance again. People may also drink more alcohol to relieve the boredom that may come with staying at home without much to do.

## What happens when we drink more?

- **Alcohol affects your ability to fight disease** - Alcohol impacts the immune system, increasing the risk of illness and infections. So to give your immune system the best chance of fighting it off any illness, whether it be coronavirus, influenza or the common cold this winter, limit your alcohol intake.
- **Alcohol affects your mood, thoughts and feelings** - Drinking can negatively affect your mood, making you prone to symptoms of depression and anxiety. It can also reduce your capacity to monitor and regulate your thoughts and feelings. Once we start drinking, it's hard to know when we've had enough, and this can lead to increased consumption and dependence.
- **Alcohol affects your sleep** - Alcohol can disrupt sleep. You may fall asleep more quickly from the sedating effects of alcohol, but as your body processes it the sedative effects wear off, making you wake up through the night and find it hard to fall back to sleep.
- **Alcohol ties up the health system and emergency services** - People are more accident prone when they are drinking alcohol. And drinking can also increase the risk of family violence. So an increase in drinking alcohol risks harm to ourselves and others, and tying up emergency services and hospitals, which are needed in our response to the coronavirus.

## How can we manage our alcohol consumption?

Don't stock up on alcohol. The more you have in the house, the more likely you are to drink. Monitor your drinking. If you are getting together online with friends for a 'quiet couple', make it just that. And remember that any adverse changes to your drinking habits now may become a pattern in the future.

## How can we manage stress without alcohol?

If you catch yourself worrying, try to remind yourself this is a temporary situation, and know that you are not alone in feeling worried, and that it's normal. There are lots of healthy ways to manage those feelings. Exercise and try to get as much sleep as you can. Worry can disrupt sleep and lack of sleep can worsen mental health. Find some great tips on the [F4F COVID-19 Page](#).

Build in pleasant activities to your day. Even if you can't do the usual activities that bring a smile to your face, think about some new things you might enjoy and make sure you do one of those things every day, including something physical. It's ok to enjoy a drink or two every now and then, but try not to go overboard, and monitor your stress levels to give yourself the best chance to stay healthy. We're all in this together.

If you'd like to talk to someone about your drinking or other substance use call the alcohol and drug helpline 0800 787 797. If, during this lockdown period you are trying to manage your substance use or supporting someone who is, you can find some useful information at <https://www.drugfoundation.org.nz/covid-19/>