# Small changes for big benefits

The less alcohol you drink, the lower your risk of harm.

Around a quarter of adults in Australia are exceeding the [Australian Alcohol Guidelines](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol), which recommend limiting alcohol to no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day.

It’s no wonder making a change can be challenging when we’re surrounded by alcohol – at social functions, in supermarkets, at sporting events and in all kinds of advertising. When this is normalised, it makes it harder to pinpoint if your use of alcohol is becoming a problem, for yourself or for those around you, and what to do about it if so.

More and more, from well-known names to [everyday Australians](https://fare.org.au/voicesofchange/), we’re hearing stories of people who have recognised the harm alcohol is doing and the benefits they’re seeing to their health, wellbeing and relationships once they’ve cut back or quit entirely.

Comedy legend Dave Hughes [shared his experiences](https://fare.org.au/daves-story/) with FARE recently. Soon after he stopped drinking, he noticed a real change in his mental health.

“Life turned around very quickly for me afterwards,” he said. “I just felt a lot better straight away.

“I was very unsettled. Stopping drinking definitely helped me focus 100 per cent... I don’t think I would have had the mental capacity to do comedy if I’d kept drinking.”

For [bodyboarder Tyler,](https://fare.org.au/tylers-story/) drinking alcohol progressed from a social activity into something he found himself relying on. He decided to make a change in his 30s when he realised he wasn’t coping.

“The only way I can describe it is like there was this war raging inside of me...it just became too much; it was a breaking point,” he said. “[I thought] where’s the problem in my life? The one consistent thing that was there was alcohol.”

Tyler felt that stopping drinking altogether was the best way forward for him. He’s now been sober for more than 12 months.

“I’ve learned so much about myself,” he said. “I’ve reconnected with the ocean, with surfing – I’m surfing as much now as I probably was in my mid-teens.

“The triggers absolutely do come through sometimes. But they’re followed up with equally strong thoughts I’ve intentionally drilled into myself to stop me from going back down that path.”

Whether you’re drinking regularly or every now and then, you’ll see benefits in cutting back on alcohol. As well as lowering your risk of longer-term health problems – such as cancer, heart and liver disease, and stroke – cutting back makes a difference in the short term too. You might notice improved mood and sleep, increased energy and concentration, weight loss and positive changes in your relationships with loved ones.

If you’re thinking about the role of alcohol in your life and what you can gain by drinking less, here are three tips and some helpful resources to get you started.

**1. Work out where you’re at**

Checking in with yourself about your use of alcohol is a good starting point. How often are you drinking and how much each time? Do you tend to drink more in certain social situations or around particular people? Is drinking alcohol affecting your physical or mental health or your work, home life or relationships?

It can be easy to underestimate how much and how often we’re drinking. Considering these questions can give you a clearer picture, helping you to spot patterns and find areas you’d like to change.

Think about keeping a record for a while. Use Turning Point’s [alcohol self-assessment tool](https://www.turningpoint.org.au/treatment/self-assessments), download an app like [Drinks Meter](https://www.drinksmeter.com/), or look at Alcohol. Think Again’s [standard drinks calculator](https://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/alcohol-your-health/online-tools/standard-drink-tool/) – or simply write it down.

**2. Make small changes**

When it comes to cutting back on alcohol, small changes go a long way. Begin with goals that are achievable for you. Remember that any changes you make will have a positive effect on your health and wellbeing.

Here are some ideas:

* Commit to having alcohol-free days each week.
* Choose non-alcoholic drinks particularly when at events or socialising with friends.
* If you drink, choose smaller serving sizes, drinks with a lower alcohol content, or keep your pour to less than a full glass.
* Set yourself a limit on the number of standard drinks you plan to have.
* Drink slowly – alternate each alcoholic drink with a glass of water or other non-alcoholic choice.
* Avoid top-ups, and don’t say yes to another drink if you haven’t finished one yet.
* If you’re going out, offer to be the designated driver and make sure you stay under the legal blood alcohol level for driving.

**3. Reach out for extra help**

It can help to know that you don’t have to go it alone. Tell your friends and family you’re making a change, and that you’d like their support. Sharing your goals with others can help boost your commitment and create a supportive network of people to encourage you to keep going.

If you’ve been drinking alcohol heavily for a long time, cutting back or quitting on your own can be dangerous. Talk with your GP about withdrawal planning, prescribing medication, or referring you to services you might find useful.

Have a look at our [contact list](https://fare.org.au/support/) for more information about the support options available to you.