

Use SMART Goals to Change How You Drink Alcohol

If you want to change how much alcohol you drink, it can be helpful to learn how to set realistic goals you can achieve. Whether you work with a health coach or are preparing for this healthy change on your own, goals will play a vital role in your success because they give you a road map.

One way to set practical, achievable goals is to use the SMART goal model to help you think through and evaluate your plans.

What are SMART goals?

SMART is an acronym for a goal-setting method that asks you to name your objectives and create a clear path to help you achieve them. It stands for:

Specific: A goal needs to be well-defined and clearly worded in a positive statement to be used as a guide.

Measurable: This allows you to track your progress.

Action-Oriented: You are more likely to achieve your goal if it includes steps and actions you can and will take.

Realistic: Goals can motivate you to grow and challenge yourself, but they also need to work for you so that you can actually achieve them.

Time-limited: You're more likely to reach a goal if it has a deadline or time limit.

You may need to modify your SMART goals along the way to keep you on track in your health journey.

How to use SMART goals to cut down on how much you drink

Here are some statements based on SMART goals that can work if you want to limit or stop your drinking:

- Starting today, I will no longer use alcohol.
- Starting this week, I will only allow myself two drinks nightly or no drinks at all every Wednesday.
- Starting today, I will stay away from places that make me want to drink.

It's important to write down your goals, action steps, measurements, and a time frame. Keep a copy of them handy so that you can review them when you need to and remind yourself of your wellness journey.

To set yourself up for success, your goals will ideally build on your previous experiences. Think about what has and hasn't worked in the past when you've tried to make healthy lifestyle changes. What can you do differently this time that will help you?

Other tips to think about when setting goals are:

- When goals become “easy,” find ways to make them more challenging.
- Pair your goals with a habit that is already established.
- If your main goal is future-focused, set an interim SMART goal that you can start within a few days.
- Anticipate challenges. It’s OK if you don’t have solutions to all of them.
- Think about your confidence level during the goal-setting process. Your SMART goals should be achievable. If you’re trying to cut alcohol out of your life entirely and you’re struggling after a week, you could try slowing down your schedule.

If you believe your alcohol consumption has reached a point where you may have a drinking problem, speak to your doctor about treatment options. You can also contact your assistance program or other confidential counselling service available to you for support.

This article was written in collaboration with certified health and wellness coach Patricia Flack.

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