



My CHOICE

A workbook for making changes

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking the time to pick up the My Choice workbook.

You may have decided to read this workbook because you are concerned about your own alcohol use, or that of someone you care about.

Alcohol is commonly used in our society, and most people do not experience any harms from their drinking. However, others do experience harm related to their drinking behaviours.

This workbook is for anyone who wants to gain a better understanding about drinking and wants to make some changes around their drinking behaviours. The goal of this workbook is to help you develop a healthy relationship with alcohol, whether that means changing your drinking behaviour or not drinking alcohol at all. This workbook is meant to be used as a guide to help you on the path to making different choices around drinking. It is not meant to, and will not, have all the answers.

You already have several useful tools and the ability to change your drinking behaviour. You may need help identifying these tools, or need support in making changes.

Feel free to take from this workbook what you would like, you may take your time to complete the exercises or re-do them as many times as you would like. However, some activities might not seem to make sense until you have read the corresponding section, or the “Facts about Alcohol” booklet, which is in the back pocket of this workbook.

You have the power to make changes in your life. By being aware of your drinking and taking action, such as reading or using this workbook, you have already begun to make positive changes in your health and well-being.

IS DRINKING A PROBLEM FOR ME?

At this point you may not be sure if drinking is a problem for you, or to what degree it's a problem. The following screening tool, called the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and will help you answer these questions.

AUDIT (ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS IDENTIFICATION TEST)

Instructions: For each question, choose the answer you feel is true for you. The numbers along the top are the score for each answer. Write this number in the box titled "score" for each question. Once you have answered all the questions, add the numbers in the score column to give you your total score. Write this number in the "total" box at the bottom.

The international version has been altered slightly here to adjust it to the 13.6g standard drink in Canada by changing "six" to "five" in Question 3.



AUDIT (ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS IDENTIFICATION TEST)

Question	0	1	2	3	4	Score
1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	Never	Monthly or less	2-4 times a month	2-3 times a week	4 or more times a week	
2. How many drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7 to 9	10 or more	
3. How often do you have five or more drinks on one occasion?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
5. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
6. How often during the last year have you needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
7. How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
8. How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
9. Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?	No		Yes, but not in the last year		Yes, during the last year	
10. Has a relative, a friend, a doctor or another health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?	No		Yes, but not in the last year		Yes, during the last year	
						Total

WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS

If you scored below 8, (or 7 if you are a woman) your level of drinking is not causing significant harm in your life. However, you may want to read this workbook as you might find information that is of interest to you.

If you scored 8 to 19, this workbook may be helpful to you. You have experienced some harm from your current drinking behaviours, or are drinking at levels where there are physical and health consequences.

If you scored 20 or more, you may wish to contact your doctor or seek further help from a more formal treatment program before beginning to change your drinking behaviour. You may need medical monitoring while changing your drinking behaviour, as you may experience some level of withdrawal from alcohol. It is important to have medical monitoring if you experience withdrawal symptoms in case you have severe symptoms or possible complications if you have other medical conditions. For more formal help, a list of resources is provided on the card in the back pocket of this workbook.

Remember: You may score below 8 and be considered to be low risk for alcohol-related problems, but you can still be at risk of experiencing problems if you combine alcohol with dangerous activities (e.g. driving or operating machinery) or with medication.

AM I READY?

If you have completed the AUDIT self-screen, you now know whether alcohol is an issue in your life. However, you may not be sure if you are ready to make changes. There are considered to be five stages when it comes to changing behaviour. These are known as the “stages of change.” It is important to know how ready you are to make the changes in your life. Research has shown that the more ready you are to make the changes, the more successful you tend to be. These stages are explained below.

PRECONTEMPLATION – You are not currently thinking of making any changes right now.

CONTEMPLATION – You now recognize the problems that your drinking is causing in your life and may be considering making some changes.

PREPARATION – You recognize the problems that your drinking is causing in your life and are planning to make changes in your life/behaviour.

ACTION – You are now making the changes in your life/behaviour in regards to your drinking.

MAINTENANCE – You have made the changes in your life/behaviour in regards to your drinking and are planning/trying to maintain the changes.

Prochaska & DiClemente, 1995.



The quick exercise below will help you to identify what stage of change you are at currently:

ALCOHOL: STAGES OF CHANGE (SHORT FORM)

Instructions: Of the six choices of answers to the question below, which seems to be the most accurate response for you?

Question: In the last month have you had five (four for women) or more drinks in a row?

1. Yes, and I do not intend to stop drinking five or more drinks in a row.
2. Yes, but I intend to stop drinking five or more drinks in a row during the next six months.
3. Yes, but I intend to stop drinking five or more drinks in a row during the next 30 days.
4. No, but I have had five or more drinks in a row in the past six months.
5. No, and I have not had five or more drinks in a row in the past six months.
6. No, I have never had five or more drinks in a row.

Scoring

If you chose Answer:		Stage
1.	=	Pre-contemplation
2.	=	Contemplation
3.	=	Preparation
4.	=	Action
5.	=	Maintenance
6.	=	Non “binge drinker” (a “binge” is considered to be consuming 5 or more drinks (4 or more for women) in a sitting)

Laforge, R. G., Maddock, J. E., & Rossi, J. S. Comparison of five stage methods for alcohol abuse among college students. Annals of Behavioral Medicine, 20, 170. 1998.

Graham, L. Alcohol Indicators Report: A framework of alcohol indicators describing the consumption of use, patterns of use, and alcohol-related harms in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia Health Promotion. 2005.

HOW DID I GET HERE?

No one plans to develop a problem with alcohol or other substances. There are many different reasons why you may have become harmfully involved with alcohol. Some common reasons are: to cope with difficult situations, to be more sociable, to lower inhibitions, or to relax.

People use alcohol in many ways, this means people use alcohol at different times, in different situations and have different levels of consumption. It's important to remember that everybody is unique, and that not only do people use alcohol differently, they may have different levels of involvement with alcohol at different times in their life too.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Many people have problems with their alcohol use. More than three out of four Nova Scotians drink. Of these, one in 20 have serious problems with alcohol. One in five drink in ways that could harm their health or relationships.

Graham, L. *Alcohol Indicators Report: A framework of alcohol indicators describing the consumption of use, patterns of use, and alcohol-related harms in Nova Scotia.* Nova Scotia Health Promotion. 2005.

WHY DO I DRINK?

Some of the reasons for drinking mentioned earlier in the workbook may have rung true for you. The next exercise gives you the chance to think more about your own reasons for drinking.

Why do you drink? (Some examples are: to be sociable, to relax, to cope with different situations, out of habit, you like the taste, etc.)

Are there any other reasons you drink?

The next exercise will help you weigh the pros and cons of your current drinking behaviour.

THE PROS AND CONS OF DRINKING

Take a few minute and think about the benefits of your drinking. There have to be some positive aspects to your use or you wouldn't be drinking. For some people, the pros may be: to be sociable, to relax, or to have fun.

Write the things you see as benefits related to your drinking. Take more space if you need it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

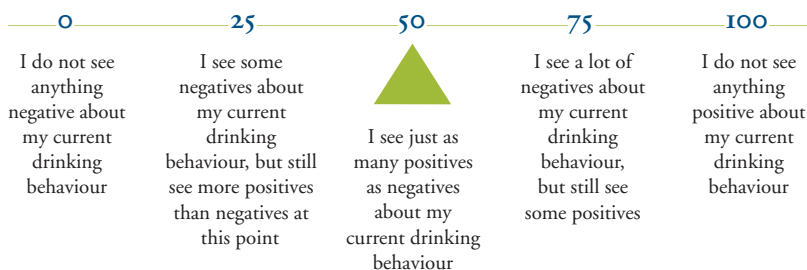
Now think about your drinking and what problems it may be causing in your life. Some examples are: Fighting with family/partner, health problems (upset stomach, poor sleep, headache/hangover etc.), problems with money, or work.

Write the things you see as negative about your drinking in the space below. Take more space if you need it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS

Now that you have listed all of the pros and cons to your drinking, it's time to weigh them. This will help you decide if you need to make any changes in your drinking behaviour. Take a look at the scale below. Rate where you feel you fall (from 0 to 100).



Write your score here _____

WHAT DOES MY SCORE MEAN?

If you chose anywhere from 0 to 49, you feel that there are more positives than negatives to your drinking behaviour right now. This does NOT mean that this workbook won't be a useful tool for you. If you choose to read on, you may still find something that interests you, and by reading the workbook you will have increased your knowledge around harmful drinking, and may decide to come back and complete the workbook later.

If you chose 50, you feel that the positives and negatives of your drinking behaviour are equal. You may be having a difficult time deciding if you need, or want, to make any changes to your drinking behaviour. It is all right to be unsure about your next step. By reading on, you may find some more useful information that will help you make a decision. You may want to come back and try the "pros and cons" exercise at another time, as your list of pros/cons may have changed. These could tip the balance of the scale one way or the other.

If you chose from 51 to 100, you feel that there are more negatives than positives to your current drinking behaviour. This workbook could be a helpful tool, as you feel there are important reasons for changing your drinking behaviour.





KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR DRINKING

Keeping track of your drinking can give you an idea of how much you drink and under what circumstances. This can be helpful in deciding what changes to make, and how to make them.

Tracking your drinking can also help you decide on a drinking goal and evaluate your progress toward your goal. Tracking your drinking for a short period of time (a few weeks) may help you to decide on your goals around drinking (whether it be cutting down or quitting). When you are working toward your goal, you may want to continue using the drinking log. Having a record of your progress can encourage you to continue working toward your goals. You can use this log for as long as you want, but it may take some time to clearly see patterns in your behaviour. It'll require some work to keep track of your drinking, but it can provide you with some useful information.

The Daily Drinking Tracking Log booklet is located in the back pocket of this workbook. The instructions for filling out the tracking form are on the first page of the booklet, along with a sample completed form. You will be asked to track how many “standard” drinks you have each day. In Canada a “standard drink” is considered to be 13.6 g of pure alcohol, or the amount of alcohol in one 12 oz. can or bottle of regular beer, one 5 oz. glass of wine or one 1.5 oz. “shot” of distilled spirits like rum and vodka.

This picture may help you to get an idea of the size of a standard drink.

FULL STRENGTH BEER	WINE	FORTIFIED WINE	SPIRITS
341ml 5% Alcohol	142ml 12% Alcohol	85ml 16–18% Alcohol	43ml 40% Alcohol
			

Do I Cut Down or Stop Drinking?

The thought of making changes in your life can be overwhelming. You may want to break the changes down into smaller steps to make them more manageable. First, decide on a goal. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How do I see the future?
- What role do I see alcohol playing in my life?

The answer to these questions may be “I want to be able to set some limits around my drinking” or “I don’t want to drink at all.”

To be successful, you have to be comfortable with your goal. This section will help you decide on a goal. There are no right or wrong answers – everyone will make different choices and have different goals.

WHAT IS CUTTING DOWN?

Does cutting down mean cutting your current drinking in half? Does it mean cutting out a couple of drinks a day? The answer depends on how much you are currently drinking. It could mean cutting what you are currently drinking in half, or drinking on average one less drink each day. To keep it simple, if you choose a goal of cutting down, don’t exceed these “low risk drinking guidelines”

- 0 : Zero drinks = lowest risk of an alcohol-related problem
- 1 : Have one or two non-drinking days a week
- 2 : No more than two drinks on any one day
- 9 : Women: up to nine drinks a week
- 14 : Men: up to 14 drinks a week

Note: These are “low-risk” guidelines.
They are not “no-risk” guidelines.

WHAT IS CUTTING DOWN?

You may still be at risk of experiencing harms in certain situations, and the low risk drinking guidelines **DO NOT** apply.

It is recommended that you stop drinking if you:

- have health problems such as liver disease or mental illness
- are taking medications such as sedatives, painkillers or sleeping pills
- have a personal or family history of drinking problems
- have a family history of cancer or other risk factors for cancer
- are pregnant, trying to get pregnant or breastfeeding (there is NO safe level of drinking in this situation)
- will be operating vehicles such as cars, trucks, motorcycles, boats, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles or bicycles
- need to be alert; for example, if you will be operating machinery or working with farm implements or dangerous equipment
- will be doing sports or other physical activities where you need to be in control
- are responsible for the safety of others at work or at home
- are told not to drink for legal, medical or other reasons

Adapted from Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2006)

Before you make your decision to cut down or quit, consider whether cutting down your drinking will mean struggling for several more years with alcohol-related issues. If so, cutting out drinking altogether may be a better decision for you.

If you choose to cut down on your drinking, or change some of your drinking behaviours, it's important to set a plan or goal for how you will drink to prevent harms from your drinking. You can set daily and weekly goals for how much you will drink, as well as in what situations you will drink.

Some examples of goals you might set for different situations are:

- I will never drink when I might drive, or have to do something where I need to be alert.
- I will not drink when I am with certain people or at certain places.
- I will not drink when I am anxious/angry/nervous/bored etc.
- I will only drink with meals.
- I will have a non-alcohol drink with every drink.

If you sign the drinking goal contract, with a goal of cutting down, you will be able set some situational goals.

If you are thinking about cutting down on your drinking, you may also want to think about stopping drinking for a period of time (a few weeks) before attempting to cut down. A lot of research has shown that some people find it helpful to stop drinking for a bit before they try drinking at lower levels. This allows your body to have a rest from alcohol and gives you the chance to have some time to think about what goal works for you: cutting down or quitting.

You can also choose to cut down, and slowly reduce your drinking, with the ultimate goal of stopping.

Of course if you have been steadily drinking large amounts for a while, suddenly stopping drinking or significantly reducing your drinking can be dangerous, therefore you should seek medical help.

SOME QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

The choice between cutting down or stopping drinking is ultimately up to you, though you may want to take such things as your health, the people in your life, and work into account. Some specific questions you may want to ask yourself are:

- Do I experience any withdrawal signs (such as shakes, nausea, sweating) when I cut down or stop drinking suddenly?
- Do I have any mental, medical or emotional problems (such as cirrhosis of the liver, hepatitis, heart condition, depression) that is made worse, or caused by drinking?
- Am I pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant or currently breastfeeding?
- Am I on medications (such as blood thinners, heart medication, or anti-anxiety drugs) that make it dangerous to drink?
- Did I complete the AUDIT self-screen at the beginning of the workbook and score 20 or more?
- Have I tried to stop or reduce my drinking in the past and was not able to?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may want to consider setting a goal to stop drinking. This is recommended because there are many significant harms and consequences to continued drinking in these situations, such as medical complications and birth defects.

However, if you answered “no” to the previous questions, and you feel:

- You want to try cutting down, and you think it is a realistic choice for you
- You have the support to make the necessary changes in your life to help you cut down
- You are not choosing cutting down as a way to continue drinking at unsafe levels

Then maybe cutting down on your drinking and making changing in your drinking patterns and behaviour is a good option for you.

Now that you have thought about your goal for drinking, it is a good idea to again weigh the positives and negatives of your goal choice to see if it is right for you.

THE POSITIVES AND THE NEGATIVES OF CUTTING DOWN OR STOPPING DRINKING

Write down the positive aspects of cutting down your drinking in the first column, then write down the negative aspects of cutting down below this. Write the positive aspects of quitting completely in the second column, and the negative aspects of quitting below again.

It is important you are honest with yourself, and take your time while completing this exercise.

CUTTING DOWN	STOPPING
POSITIVES	
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
NEGATIVES	
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

Now look closely at what you have written. Which seems to be more important, or have the most impact to you; the positive of cutting down, the negatives of quitting, etc?

What have you decided will work best for you, cutting down or stopping?

Write your decision here: for my drinking goal, I have chosen to

Remember, your goal today does not have to be written in stone forever. It's a good idea to review your drinking goal regularly to see if it is still the best choice for you. Your situation may have changed or you may have learned new coping skills so your goal may no longer be right for you.

DRINKING GOAL CONTRACT

Now that you have decided on a goal, you may choose to fill in this drinking goal contract. It can be easy to forget why you are working hard and want to make changes in your life. This contract can remind you when you are having tough moments. The contract is an important part of developing a drinking plan that works for you (whether your plan is to stop drinking or cut down), as some people find it helpful to map out their plan on paper. This also allows you to put together all of the information and decisions from the previous exercises. The goal you chose to fill out here can either be long-term or short-term; you can decide to rethink your goal at anytime.

TO FILL OUT THIS CONTRACT:

Begin by filling in section A.

- 1). Write your name, and the goal you've set, such as cutting-down, stopping, or stopping for a while before cutting down.
- 2). Write some reasons why you have chosen this goal. For example, to feel healthier, to do better at work, not fight with partner etc. (these may be similar to the problems you listed in the "pros and cons of drinking" exercise)
- 3). Write the day you are going to start making these changes.

If you have a goal of cutting down, complete section B.

- 1). Write whether you have chosen to stop drinking before cutting down and for how long.
- 2). Write the maximum number of drinks you will have in a day.
- 3). Write the maximum number of drinks you will have in a week.
- 4). Write the situations or times when you will not drink .
- 5). Write the situations or times when you will drink within the daily and weekly limits on which you've decided.

DRINKING GOAL CONTRACT

PART A

I, _____ (name), have decided to _____
(1. Cut-down 2. Stop 3. Cut-down, then stop 4. stop for awhile,
then cut down) from my previous drinking behaviour.

I have chosen this goal because: _____

I will stop/cut down on _____ / _____ / _____ (day/month/year)

PART B

To be completed if deciding on a goal on cutting down.

I have/have not, decided to stop drinking for a period of _____
before cutting down. (Circle choice)

My drinking goal for each week will be that I;

Drink no more than _____ drinks a day.

Drink no more than _____ drinks a week.

I will not drink _____

I will not drink _____

I will not drink _____

I will not drink _____

I will drink within my daily and weekly limits under the following
circumstances:

If/when _____

If/when _____

If/when _____

If/when _____

I can review this contract at any time.

Signed _____

Date _____

MEETING AND KEEPING YOUR GOAL

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN YOUR GOAL?

Now that you have decided on a goal, ask yourself “How ready am I to make changes?” It may be clear that you *need* to make some changes, and you may *want* to make some changes, but you still may feel you are just not *ready* to commit to them, or you may not be clear on what specific changes you need to make.

You may want to ask yourself “How important is it to me that I meet my goal?” Maybe it is the most important thing in your life right now, maybe it is somewhat important, or maybe it is very low on your list of priorities.

Another question to ask is “How confident am I that I will meet my goal?” The confidence you have in meeting your goal is different than how important the goal is to you. For example, you can be very confident in achieving your goal, but feel it isn’t very important to do so.

It is a good idea to think about how important your goal is to you, and how confident you are in meeting it because the higher the importance and your confidence, the greater chance you have of meeting your goal.

HOW DO I STOP DRINKING?

The decision to stop drinking is bigger and more involved than just deciding to stop drinking one day. You will have to make the decision not to drink in many different situations. Just like deciding to cut down, you will need to have a plan to deal with your triggers, urges and setbacks.

HOW DO I CUT DOWN?

If you have decided to cut down, an important thing to do is to think about the way you drink and consider drinking in ways that are less harmful. The number of drinks you have is not the only thing you should consider: the “where”, and “when” and “how” of your drinking has a great impact on the harms you might experience.

Remember that it can often take a number of tries to be successful, whether you have chosen to cut down or stop drinking.

The safer drinking practices listed below will give you some ideas of how you might drink in safer ways. Some may also apply if your goal is to stop drinking, or in situations where you do not want to drink.

SAFER DRINKING PRACTICES

- Decide when and where you are going to drink, if you are going to drink (plan ahead)
- Keep lots of non-alcohol drinks handy (bring your own)
- Plan to be the designated driver
- Switch between alcohol and non-alcohol drinks (for every drink, try having a non-alcohol drink in-between)
- Pay attention to how much you have had to drink
- Slow down (don't drink your drinks too fast)

Remember that there is no “trick” for cutting down or quitting, but these safer practices can be useful to remember.

TRIGGERS

Triggers are the patterns in your behaviours before you drink, or around your drinking. These can be places, situations or events. For example, you may find that you drink too much when you have a particularly hard day at work, or when you meet your friend on Saturday night. In these cases, the stressful day and going out with the friend on a Saturday night are all triggers.

It is important to know what your triggers are and have a plan for dealing with them in a way other than drinking. This will increase your chance of meeting your goal.

IDENTIFYING MY TRIGGERS

Note: *To complete this exercise, you'll need to have completed the Daily Drinking Tracking Log for **at least two weeks**, preferably longer. The longer you have completed the Daily Drinking Tracking Log, the more easily you'll be able to see patterns in your drinking behaviour.*

Take a look at your entries in the Daily Drinking Tracking Log so far. Look at the days that you drank more than what you intended for the day and the days you had the strongest urge to drink. Place a mark beside these days or highlight them. Now look at what you have written in the last two columns on the days you highlighted (the ones titled "What was the context of the drinking or urge?" and "Thoughts and feelings about your drinking or urges"). Copy what you wrote on these days here:

Do you see any patterns or similarities between what you have written on these days? Maybe you found that you always drink or have urges to drink with a particular person, or at a particular place. Maybe you found out that your drinking is usually around issues at work and stress, or simply because it has become a habit.

DEALING WITH THE TRIGGERS

Now that you know what your triggers are, it's important to know how to deal with them. While first trying to make these important changes in your drinking behaviour, you may want to avoid or cut down the number of times you are exposed to your triggers. For example, if you find that certain people or places are triggering drinking behaviour, you may not want to go to that place or spend time with that person for a while, until you have established some good coping strategies for these triggers.

TIPS FOR COPING WITH THE URGE TO DRINK INCLUDE:

- Do some physical exercise or other distracting activity
- Have something to eat, or a non-alcoholic drink
- Leave the situation
- Use relaxation techniques, such as breathing or visualizations
- Think of the positive consequences of not drinking and the negative consequences of resuming excessive drinking
- Delay having a drink for 15 minutes (if goal is to cut down)
- Take the money you would have used to drink and put it towards something you have always wanted (vacation, new outfit, night out, etc.)
- Make a list of why you don't want to drink
- Try planning activities that don't involve drinking

Adapted from Shand, F. Gates, J. Drinking Decisions: a Guide for Drinkers. Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. 2004. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia reproduced by permission. Pg 21.



COPING STRATEGIES

Note: *To complete this exercise, you'll need to have completed the "Identifying my triggers" exercise.*

Take a look at the triggers you checked in the "Identifying my triggers" exercise, and write them in the "trigger" column below.

Next, look at the list of safer drinking practices and tips for coping with urges, given on pages 19 & 21, and write the ones that you think would work well for you in the "coping strategy" column. Feel free to use the same strategy for different trigger situations, and to use more than one strategy for the same trigger. You may also find it helpful to add your own ideas for coping strategies.

Some examples are given to help you out.

Trigger	Coping strategy
E.g. I drink when I am having a hard time getting to sleep.	I will pay attention to my mood (if I am stressed or upset) to see if that is what is keeping me awake. I will anticipate this problem and have a glass of warm milk before I even go to bed.
E.g. I drink when I am out with Bob.	I will bring my own juice, pop or other drink with me. I will set the number of drinks I will have and stick to it.

Now that you have some practical solutions for dealing with your triggers, go ahead and practice them. You may find it helpful to rehearse what you will say in certain situations, or what you will do. You can do this in your head, in front of a mirror, or with someone you trust. These statements can come in handy whenever you are offered a drink, or want to leave a situation:

- “No thanks, not right now.”
- “I can’t – I’m driving.”
- “My doctor said I should cut down.”
- “I’m trying to cut down.”
- “I can only stay for a little while tonight.”
- “I have to get home.”

GETTING SUPPORT

It can be helpful to get support from someone close to you while you are working on this workbook. They can give you support by lending an ear, encouraging you or simply being there. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

If you do have someone who will provide you with support, you may want to ask him or her to read the “To those lending a hand” pamphlet in the back of the workbook.

REWARD YOURSELF

Once your drinking behaviour has changed for the healthier, you may find you have a lot of free time on your hands, or that you miss your old drinking routine. It is important to reward yourself for your hard work. There are different, healthier ways to reward yourself for coming this far than having a celebration drink.

You can:

- Tell someone about your success.
- Do something you have always wanted to do – go skydiving, go on a trip, etc.
- Take up a hobby. Try something new, or reconnect with something you used to love doing, but stopped when other things got in the way.
- Reconnect with friends you lost touch with, or make new friends.
- Treat yourself. Have a nice dinner or evening out, go to a concert etc. if you find you have some spare money now that you otherwise were spending on alcohol, save it and do something nice for yourself or someone else.

LOOK HOW FAR YOU HAVE COME

Sometimes it may seem like the steps you've taken have been very small – remind yourself of your successes. Take a look back to when you started your Daily Drinking Tracking Log. Then look through each one you filled out. You can probably see a difference between the weeks. Even if you have not met the goal you had set for yourself, you've probably still made some positive changes. For example, you have hopefully increased your knowledge about alcohol, or maybe have some more insight into your own drinking behaviour. Even if you did not set a particular goal in your drinking behaviour, perhaps you are now thinking more about making some changes, or about getting further support.

Take the time to recognize and enjoy any positive changes.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Write down the positive changes you can see.

DEALING WITH SETBACK AND SLIPS

Sticking with your goal can be very difficult at times. For some people; there may be lots of twists and turns and obstacles along the path. For others, the path might be smoother. Do not get discouraged if you see people that seem to be able to make changes easily. You may want to think about how long you have been dealing with this problem, or how long it took these problems to develop. Then think about how realistic it would be to have these problems worked out in a week. Changing your drinking behaviour is a process that does not have a set timeline; it will take longer for some than others.

If you have a setback, it's easy to say, "Well, I've already blown my goal, I might as well keep going," **Stop right there.** A setback does NOT put you back at the beginning. Seeing a setback or slip as only a turn in the path or a bump in the road, you are thinking positively and giving yourself the best chance of success.



“There is a difference between a slip (setback) and a relapse.

- A slip is considered any use above your drinking goal (i.e. one drink is a slip if your goal is to stop drinking. If your goal on a day is to drink less than two drinks and you had four, you’ve had a slip.)
- A relapse is returning to the same level and pattern of use as before. For example, if you return to daily drinking, not sleeping well, arguing with your partner, and missing work when your goal was abstinence, you’ve relapsed.
- Benefits of distinguishing between a slip and a relapse include: supporting slips to not become relapses. While recognizing the real dangers of slipping, but not blowing them out of proportion, you can allow yourself to get back on track.
- Having a “coping” plan can be likened to a fire-escape plan. Few would set their house on fire to see if their escape plan works well. A slip can cause terrible damage and danger. Just as knowing the “Stop, Drop, and Roll” strategy may save your life in a fire, having your own coping strategies is critical in achieving long-term changes you want to make.”

Adapted from BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. Problem Substance Use workbook (2004). Pg. 43.

If you have a setback, you might find it helpful to go back through some of the exercises or re-read certain sections. You might also find it helpful to revisit your reasons for wanting to change your drinking behaviour and return to the drinking limits you have set for yourself. A setback does not put you back at the beginning of the process of making changes. By completing this workbook you have gained and built upon skills and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to read this workbook. Hopefully you have found it helpful in your journey to changing your drinking behaviour. Ideally you have learned more about what alcohol is, have built upon your existing skills and now have a relationship with alcohol that is free from problems to you and those around you. Perhaps you have even learned a few new skills. If you have not been successful in making the changes you have wanted to make, hopefully this workbook has given you the opportunity or tools to get the additional support you need. Making life changes is not easy, and you should be proud of the success you have achieved. Deciding to seek further help is a success in itself.

If you feel you need some more help, get it. There is a list of resources on the card in the back pocket of the workbook. Capital Health's Addiction Prevention and Treatment Services offers many programs for people concerned about their drinking or someone else's. These programs include Community Oriented Recovery Environment (CORE), the Making Alcohol Related Changes (MARC) program, the Others Affected Group, as well as Community Counselling Support Services (CCSS), which has offices located throughout Capital Health.

For more information about any of these programs, or to access help, please contact:

Capital Health, Addiction Prevention & Treatment Services

424-8866 or toll-free: 1-866-340-6700

or visit www.cdha.nshealth.ca (Click "Capital Health A-Z")



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