DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE DRINKING HABITS

How much do you drink? Is it the right amount for you? You may know the answer to this question already, or you may not have given it much thought. Many people learn through a single unpleasant experience how alcohol affects them. Others suffer ill effects but choose to ignore or deny them. To make responsible, informed choices about using alcohol, first consider whether there is any history of alcohol abuse in your family. If someone in your family is dependent on alcohol, you have a higher-than-average likelihood of becoming dependent too. Second, consider whether you are dependent on other substances or behaviors. Do you smoke, drink strong coffee every day, or use other drugs regularly? Does some habit control your life? Some people have more of a tendency to become addicted than others, and a person with one addiction is often likely to have other addictions as well. If this is the case for you, again, you may need to be more cautious with alcohol. This behavior change plan focuses on developing responsible drinking habits on your own. However, if your alcohol use is causing serious problems in your life and/or if you meet the criteria for abuse or dependence, you should seek professional help.

Getting Ready for Change: A Cost-Benefit Analysis

Do you feel ready and committed to examine and change your drinking behavior? Although your primary surface reason for developing and implementing a behavior change project may be to get a good grade in your wellness course, you’re more likely to be successful both now and in the long term if you believe that the benefits of changing outweigh the costs. As an initial step in your program, complete an analysis of the benefits and costs of change for you using the Behavior Change Cost-Benefit Analysis worksheet found later in this document. Use your analysis to create a list of your major reasons for behavior change—and then post your list in a prominent location.

In your analysis, include the short-term and long-term costs and benefits of both your current behavior and your new behavior. For example, your current pattern of alcohol use may allow you to socialize and have fun with certain friends but it may also increase your risk of engaging in unsafe behaviors and being injured. Consider physical and emotional effects on yourself and others. For example, would more moderate drinking habits support your self-image or personal values? Are safety and being in control of your behavior important to you, and is your current lifestyle supporting that value? Are your grades being affected? Are your drinking habits impacting or influencing others in a negative way? Ask friends and family members about how they see your drinking habits and their effect on you and those around you. For more information about the effects of alcohol use, visit the appropriate Wellness Links section on the Online Learning Center for your text.

Gather Data and Establish a Baseline

Once you are ready to make changes in your drinking habits, find out more about your alcohol-related behavior by keeping track of your drinking for several weeks. Use the Pre-Program Alcohol Intake Log or create your own journal or log. Include information on the following:

- **The drinking situation**: Time of day, type and amount of drink, how fast you drank it, where you were, and what else you were doing.
- **Your internal state**: What made you want to drink and your feelings, thoughts and concerns at the time. Note how others influenced you.
- **The consequences of drinking**: Any changes in your feelings or behavior while or after you were drinking, such as silliness, aggressiveness, depression, unsafe or embarrassing behaviors, hangover, and missed classes or study time. Ask friends and family members about what they see as the consequences of your drinking—on both you and them.

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Analyze Your Data

Evaluate your alcohol use by examining your logs and determining your typical pattern of consumption. How much do you drink on a daily or weekly basis? Do you exceed the limits recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (no more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women)? Do you drink to the point of intoxication?

Analyze your record to detect patterns of feelings and environmental cues that contribute to your drinking. Do you always drink when you’re at a certain place or with certain people? Do you sometimes drink just to be sociable, when you don’t really want a drink and would be satisfied with a nonalcoholic beverage? Do you drink when you are anxious in a social setting?

If your alcohol consumption is high, if you are suffering serious consequences as a result of your drinking, and/or if you are showing any signs of alcohol abuse or dependence, you should seek professional help.

Set Goals

Now that you’ve analyzed your record, think about whether you want to change any of your drinking-related behaviors. Would you do better academically if you drank less? Has drinking had a negative impact on any of your relationships? Have you risked infection and unplanned pregnancy by having unprotected sex while drunk? Do you depend on alcohol in order to have a good time? Have you driven while intoxicated or been injured while drinking? If alcohol use is affecting your life in a negative way, it is time to change your drinking behavior. Decide on goals that will give you the best health and safety returns, such as one beer or a glass of wine with dinner, one-half drink per hour at a party, or no alcohol at all.

For the purposes of this behavior change plan, use the following definitions of a “drink”:
• 12-ounce beer
• 5-ounce glass of wine
• 1.5-ounce cocktail
Each of these drinks has about 0.6 ounces of ethyl alcohol, the psychoactive ingredient in alcoholic beverages.

Develop Strategies and a Plan for Change

Once you’ve set your goal, you need to develop strategies that will help you achieve that goal. Take a close look at your alcohol intake logs to see what kinds of patterns your drinking falls into and where you can intervene to break the behavior chain. For some people, simple changes in the environment such as stocking the refrigerator with alternative beverages like juices or sparkling water can be helpful. If you feel self-conscious about ordering a nonalcoholic drink when you’re out with a group, try recruiting a friend to do it at the same time. If it’s very difficult to avoid drinking in some situations, such as at a bar or beer party, you may decide to avoid those situations for a period of time.

Examine your friendships. If drinking is becoming a problem for you and some of your friends can’t seem to socialize without drinking heavily, you may need to think about letting those relationships go. If you find support groups helpful, check with your college counseling center or health clinic; most schools sponsor peer group activities for those who are working to change their drinking habits.

Instead of drinking, you can try other activities that produce the same effect. For example, if you drink to relieve anxiety or tension, try adding 20-30 minutes of exercise to your schedule to help you manage stress. Or try doing a relaxation exercise or going for a brisk walk to help reduce anxiety before a party or date. If you drink...
to relieve depression or to stop worrying, consider finding a trustworthy person (perhaps a professional counselor) to talk to about the problem that’s bothering you. If you drink to feel more comfortable sexually, consider ways to improve communication with your partner so you can deal with sexual issues more openly. When these activities are successful, they will reinforce your responsible drinking decisions and make it more likely that you’ll make the same decisions again in the future.

Here are some specific tips for drinking moderately and responsibly:

• Drink slowly. Sip your drinks rather than gulping them. Do not drink alcoholic beverages to quench your thirst. Avoid drinks made with carbonated mixers, especially if you’re thirsty; you’ll be more likely to gulp them down.

• Space your drinks. Learn to drink nonalcoholic drinks at parties, or alternate them with alcoholic drinks. Learn to refuse a round: “I’ve had enough for right now.” Parties are easier for some people if they hold a glass of something nonalcoholic that has ice and a twist of lime floating in it so it looks like an alcoholic drink.

• Choose less potent sources of alcohol. Try drinking beer instead of wine or wine instead of hard drinks (shots or mixed drinks).

• Eat before and while drinking. Avoid drinking on an empty stomach; food in the stomach will somewhat decrease the rate of alcohol absorption and may lower your peak blood alcohol concentration. In restaurants, order your food before you order a drink. Try to have something to eat before you go out to a party where alcohol will be served.

• Be aware of your limits and your environment. Different settings affect your performance and your ability to judge your behavior. At a given blood alcohol concentration, you will perform less well when surrounded by activity and boisterous companions. Alcohol reduces your ability to think and function when your brain is bombarded by multiple stimuli.

• Develop an easy way to monitor your alcohol consumption while at a party. For example, if you have set a limit of two drinks while at a party, put two coins in one pocket and shift each to another pocket when you consume an alcoholic beverage.

• Practice positive self-talk to reinforce responsible attitudes. Most Americans drink moderately or not at all and are capable of enjoying their leisure time without using alcohol or other drugs. Abstaining from alcohol is more common than drinking to the point of intoxication. In some situations, abstinence is the only appropriate choice.

As a final planning step, develop some rewards for your program—for achieving intermediate and final goals as well as for just sticking with your program. Make a list of your activities and favorite events to use as rewards. They should be special, inexpensive, and preferably unrelated to food or alcohol. You might treat yourself to a concert, a ball game, a new CD, a long-distance phone call to a friend, a day off from studying for a hike in the woods—whatever is meaningful to you. List your rewards on your behavior change contract.

Complete a Contract

The last step before you put your program into action is to make a formal commitment by completing a contract. Your contract should include the following elements:

• Your name

• A statement of your goal, including your current status and target status

• A start date—choose a date in the near future

• A target completion date

• A system of mini-goals and rewards

• Your list of key strategies

• A description of the involvement of others—if you plan to have friends or family members involved in your
program, describe what they will do

• A place for your signature and, if possible, the signature of a witness—having someone else witness your contract can help make you more likely to stick with your program

Use the template provided in the Behavior Change Contract form or devise your own contract.

Monitor Your Progress

Once your plan is complete, take action. Keep track of your progress toward your goal by continuing to monitor and evaluate your alcohol consumption. Use the Alcohol Intake Program Log or devise your own form. If changing your drinking behavior turns out to be difficult, it may be a clue that drinking is becoming a problem for you. Be sure to reward yourself as you learn to drink responsibly (or not at all). You may lose weight, look better, feel better, and have higher self-esteem as a result of limiting your drinking. Remember, when you establish sensible drinking habits, you’re planning not just for this week or month—but for your whole life.
Behavior Change Cost-Benefit Analysis

Current (target) behavior: ____________________________________________

New behavior: ______________________________________________________

Short-term benefits of current behavior:

Short-term costs of current behavior:

Long-term benefits of current behavior:

Long-term costs of current behavior:

Short-term benefits of new behavior:

Short-term costs of new behavior:
*Long-term benefits of new behavior:*

*Long-term costs of new behavior:*

**Key reasons for behavior change:** Review your analysis and identify your most important reasons for changing your behavior; post your list of key reasons in a prominent location.
Name ___________________________________________ Date ___________________________________________

**Pre-Program Alcohol Intake Log**

Record the following information in the log:

• The drinking situation: Time of day, type and amount of drink, how fast you drank it, where you were, and what else you were doing.

• Your internal state: What made you want to drink and your feelings, thoughts and concerns at the time. Note how others influenced you.

• The consequences of drinking: Any changes in your feelings or behavior while or after you were drinking, such as silliness, aggressiveness, depression, unsafe or embarrassing behaviors, hangover, and missed classes or study time. Ask friends and family members about what they see as the consequences of your drinking—both on you and them.

1 drink = 12-ounce beer • 5-ounce glass of wine • 1.5-ounce cocktail

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| Total consumption:  |                |                         |
| ____ drinks         |                |                         |

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Total consumption: _____ drinks

Total weekly consumption: _____ drinks
Behavior Change Contract

(1) I __________________________ agree to __________________________
   (name)                 (specify behavior you want to change; include current status)

(2) I will begin on ______________ and plan to reach my goal of __________________________
   (start date) (specify final goal)

   by ______________
   (final target date)

(3) In order to reach my final goal, I have devised the following schedule of mini-goals. For each step in
    my program, I will give myself the reward listed.

    (mini-goal 1) (target date) (reward)
    (mini-goal 2) (target date) (reward)
    (mini-goal 3) (target date) (reward)
    (mini-goal 4) (target date) (reward)
    (mini-goal 5) (target date) (reward)

   My overall reward for reaching my final goal will be __________________________

(4) I have gathered and analyzed data on my target behavior and have identified the following strategies
    for changing my behavior:

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

(5) I will use the following tools to monitor my progress toward reaching my final goal:

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

(6) I have recruited a helper who will witness my contract and __________________________

   (list any way in which your helper will participate in your program)

(continued on following page)
I sign this contract as an indication of my personal commitment to reach my goal.

______________________________  _______________________
(your signature)                              (date)

______________________________  _______________________
(witness’s signature)                             (date)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT BEHAVIOR CHANGE PROGRAM
Alcohol Intake Program Log

Record the following information in the log; include any effects of your behavior change strategies:

- The drinking situation: Time of day, type and amount of drink, how fast you drank it, where you were, and what else you were doing.
- Your internal state: What made you want to drink and your feelings, thoughts and concerns at the time. Note how others influenced you.
- The consequences of drinking: Any changes in your feelings or behavior while or after you were drinking, such as silliness, aggressiveness, depression, unsafe or embarrassing behaviors, hangover, and missed classes or study time. Ask friends and family members about what they see as the consequences of your drinking—both on you and them.

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Total weekly consumption: ______ drinks