



Making Changes: Alcohol

Thinking about making a change or some changes to your current lifestyle?

A good idea when thinking about making a change is to decide what that change would look like.

What do you want to achieve in the long term? What steps do you need to take to achieve this? If you try to do it that way, what is likely to go wrong and how will you know? How will you know when you get there?

You have probably made lots of choices in your lifestyle before. It can be helpful to look at other times you have made changes.

What worked? What didn't?

Was there anything that got in the way?

What were the positives that came about due to that change?

What was helpful?

To get to where you want to go, it's helpful to know where you are now and where you want to be. Making a plan and writing it down is often a good idea. Below are some steps to help achieve your goals.

1) Define your goal to change

State your goal clearly. Be specific. What is your goal?

For example: do you want to stop drinking or cut down? If you want to cut down, how much do you want to cut down too?

Set achievable and realistic goals that feel manageable this will help improve your confidence.

For example: "I want to only use drink on special occasions instead of most weekends" Or "I want to stop drinking and enjoy other forms of entertainment, these include: going to the movies, the theatre, weekends away"

2) Assess your level of motivation to change

Motivation= How important is it to change? Do you think you can change? Write a list of why it is important to change?

For example: It is important for me to change my current alcohol consumption because:

*I am engaging in risk taking behavior such as...
I feel distant from my friends and family...*

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This list might include things such as finances, lifestyle, relationships, family, friends, health, employment, feelings, goals, aspirations, legal issues and any others that may be important to you.

3) Break the change down into stages

It can be helpful to brainstorm ideas on how you plan to change. Steps need to be simple and practical where possible. Develop an action plan.

The plan may include setting a date to change, and exploring other activities you can participate in to avoid falling back into old patterns.

Try to make the plan tailored to you and what is achievable at this time. If it suits you to make small steps towards your goal, then map these out in your plan.

4) Use strategies for change

Find appropriate resources and helpers. This may include asking friends and family for help and support, seeing a Counsellor or joining a support group. Think of ways to support your choice and anticipate slip ups. What can you do when you feel like going back to old patterns?

An example of this may be to phone a friend for support or write a pro's and con's list. You could read your pro's and con's list when you are feeling ambivalent about the change. Another idea is putting meditation and relaxation in your life.

Explore barriers and find ways around these.

For example: *all my friends drink regularly so I could look at meeting my friends at the gym and plan other weekend activities that don't involve drinking.*

Reward yourself and be proud of yourself. Do something special for you to reward steps along the way and continue doing this as your change progresses. Be proud of your achievements. They have taken work.

5) Maintaining Change

You could keep a diary of your change or get a friend to help motivate you. Some people find talking about their issues with friends helps while others phone a helpline, seek counselling or join a support group.

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Some people pick up new hobbies, take up mediation or Yoga or begin to do more things to pamper themselves.

Review outcomes- did things work out as planned? What else could be put in the plan?

6) Reverting back to old patterns

Changing patterns can be tough, it is quiet common to experience set backs at times. If you slip back to your old patterns try not to think of it as a failure but a learning curve, learn from the experience and continue to move forward again. Why did you revert back to old patterns? What can you do to ensure you get back to your change? Can you do anything different to prevent going back to old patterns again?

Present→Plan→Goal

Changing behaviors can seem difficult but with some planning and motivation it is achievable. Be creative, have fun, be realistic, try to stay positive and in time you will experience the positive effects of the changes you have chosen to make.

You can contact a Counsellor or other professional to guide you through this process. If you want to see a Counsellor contact MDECC on (02) 9977 0711.