



Still Drinking? – *Think It Over FIRST!*

Introduction: When it comes to drug addiction, a common debate that comes up is based on the question: *Can I still drink alcohol in moderation?*

The answer to that question can vary greatly depending upon who answers:

- There are those who swear by the rule that anyone with a substance use issue should also be 100% abstinent from alcohol as well, every time
- Others insist that in spite of their issues with drugs, they never had any issues with alcohol so a drink now and then is harmless in their opinion

Ultimately everyone needs to make a good choice with this issue so rather than debate the issue, we will review some important points to consider when making the “drink or don’t drink” decision.

Rule #1 - “The Abstinence Principle”- Obviously, abstinence from alcohol is the easiest and safest choice – If you decide not to drink alcohol at all then you don’t need to worry about any of the consequences associated with drinking. This is the safest choice

- ❖ **Who has come to the personal conclusion that abstinence from alcohol is the best decision for you?**
- ❖ **Why did you come to that decision? (Did anything happen with drinking that lead you to choose to abstain?)**

#2 - Setting a Limit – Some individuals who choose to drink in moderation do so by setting a limit on how many alcoholic drinks it would be OK to consume on occasion.

There are some key factors that cannot be ignored when someone with any substance use issue attempts to set a limit on their drinking. Most of these factors are very familiar and well known, however it is important to take the time to consider if any of these are true in your personal case:

In the list below – Review these as a group and honestly check any that may apply in your case as something you need to look out for:

- ❖ **Alcoholism** – Some people fit the definition of what would be a textbook “alcoholic” which would indicate that limit-setting or controlled drinking is impossible in their case. Some people simply cannot control their drinking no matter how many limits are put in place through no fault of their own. That is just the way it is for a segment of the population. Some well-known signs of alcoholism (Check any that apply to you)

- When I start drinking it can be very difficult (or even impossible) to stop without losing control
- At times I undergo a serious (often negative) personality change when I drink
- When I drink it is not uncommon for me to do things I later regret or can’t even remember
- When I drink I get into arguments or fights on occasion
- When I drink at times I neglect to do more important things (like go to work the next day)
- When I drink I am more likely to get arrested
- When I drink I can make bad decisions (like driving, sleeping around, overspending, etc.)



- ❖ **The “Miscalculated Drinks” Phenomenon:** Setting a limit often involves a predetermined limit on drinks to be consumed. For example: “I’ll only have 3 drinks at the party, then switch to soda”. However what is considered to be a “drink” is often confused or overlooked.

One Standard Drink:

- One 12 ounce can of beer (5% alcohol)
- One shot (1.5 ounce) of 80 proof liquor
- One glass of wine (5 ounces, 12% alcohol)

Honestly review the list below of some common games people might play when trying to limit their drinks where in reality the amount consumed can be much more than planned due to the *Miscalculated Drinks Phenomenon*. Look at each example below where the drinking **Plan** does not end up matching the **Reality**. Check off any examples below that sound familiar to you that you may have done yourself and therefore would have to watch out for if you were to attempt controlled drinking:

- Plan:** “I’ll just have 3 beers” – **Reality:** Drink three 24 ounce cans of beer (6 drinks in reality)
- Plan:** “I’ll just have 4 beers” – **Reality:** Drink a 4-pack of 9.5% craft beer (almost 8 drinks)
- Plan:** “I’ll stop at the bar for 2 quick drinks then leave” – **Reality:** Order 2 Long Island Iced Teas (4 drinks in each one x 2 = 8 drinks total)
- Plan:** “I’ll stay home and just have 2 mixed drinks and that’s it” – **Reality:** Pour your own mixed drink using regular drinking glasses around the house that easily hold 3 shots per drink (x 2 = 6 drinks in reality)

- ❖ **The “Buzzed Decision” Principle** – Remember that it may be easy to set a limit when you are sober. A statement such as “I’ll only drink 3 beers” made when sober may seem very simple. However, consider the fact that this plan requires you to make a decision not to have a 4th beer, *after you have already have had 3 beers in your system*. That is often a much different decision as it can often be much easier to just say “I’ll have one more” after you’ve already had three. Then the decisions to have or not have a 5th beer is now being made while under the influence of 4 and so on...Think about it.

Does this make sense to anyone here? Have you ever found yourself going beyond your pre-set limit because of just telling yourself “Just one more...?”

- ❖ **Medication Mixing** – Some people are prescribed medications that make having “just a few drinks” into a more intoxicating experience due to a **synergistic effect**:

- ▶ **Synergistic:** *adj. relating to the interaction of two or more substances to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.*

Mixing alcohol with prescribed substances like Benzos (Xanax, Klonopin, Valium) or Opioids or Methadone increases the level of intoxication for each standard drink. **Is this a concern for you? (Share if you’re comfortable) if not, discuss with someone (like your counselors) in private**



3 - Common Sense Considerations – “*Common sense is not that common*” (Voltaire) – There are a few common sense reasons not to bother with drinking at all (Think seriously about the risks versus the rewards of drinking). Review and discuss the following and check any that apply to you:

- Legal considerations** – If you are in a current legal situation (such as being on probation or involved in Drug Court or a DUI charge or Child Protective Services case) – Maybe you feel you could get away with drinking in moderation, but it is extremely important to ask yourself the following question: “**With my current legal situation still open, is it really worth the risk to drink at all right now?**”
- Past Problems** – If drinking has lead you down a bad road in the past, does it make sense to even try to travel that road right now or would it be better to avoid the risk altogether?
- Health** – If your health is compromised in any serious way due to a chronic illness or injury, is drinking a good idea? What might your doctor say? Are you trying to lose weight? (Alcohol has a lot of calories)
- Financial Considerations** – Drinking, even in moderation, is excess spending which is a serious consideration especially when money is tight. Going to bars can be very pricey. If you are digging yourself out of a financial hole, possibly due the effects of past addiction, does it make sense to waste money on alcohol or would that money be better spent (or saved) elsewhere?
- Lowered Inhibitions** – It is well known that alcohol lowers inhibitions. Being honest with yourself, is there a chance that loosening up with a few drinks could lead you to try to test the waters again with your drug of choice that could result in relapse?
- Alcohol Associations** – Is there a chance that drinking alcohol, even in moderation, could still lead you back to the wrong types of people who may use drugs that you could avoid if you chose not to drink?
- Denial** – This can be very tough absorb and believe is some cases, but are you considering the chance that you perhaps you mistakenly believe you can control your alcohol use but you may be wrong with eventual disastrous consequences. If there is any doubt, why risk it at all?
- Other?** – Can you think of any other common sense reasons not to drink in your current situation?

Conclusion:

After reviewing and discussing this topic, what is your current stance with regard to drinking alcohol in your personal situation right now?

(If you are not yet ready to make a decision, what are some things that stuck out to you that you may need to think over when it comes to making this decision?)