

# Aussies hide attempts to cut back on booze

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New research from the University of Adelaide has highlighted the social pressures Australians experience when they try to stop or reduce their alcohol consumption.

In a paper published today in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Review*, researchers in the University's School of Public Health reveal that Australians who are trying to cut back their [alcohol intake](#) will routinely make excuses to remove themselves from drinking situations, and they feel stigmatised for "violating expectations" about drinking in their social circles.

Ashlea Bartram has been conducting this work as part of her ongoing PhD research looking at the [social experiences](#) of people who decide to change their drinking habits.

"In interviews with participants, it became quite clear there is a stigma attached to people cutting back on alcohol or stopping it altogether. It's as though some kind of social code has been violated by the person who has chosen, for whatever reason, to stop drinking," Ms Bartram says.

She says that to avoid this stigma, non-drinkers can become adept at masking the fact they are not drinking, or else providing acceptable excuses for turning down a drink, such as being unwell or needing to drive. However, they tend to feel uncomfortable using such deceptions with close family and friends.

"As a result, people who want to cut back on alcohol often find

themselves making excuses not to attend social gatherings. They will also seek to make other arrangements so that social gatherings are not focused on activities normally associated with [alcohol consumption](#)." Ms Bartram says despite the social challenges, the participants also highlighted some positives.

"Those who found new ways to spend time with their peers that weren't focused on alcohol often find it's the best approach. Some have received strong support from their loved ones, and others have reported improved quality of social interactions – such as meaningful conversations – when alcohol is taken out of the equation."

Ms Bartram's research continues. Her aim is to develop strategies to better support people who are making a change to their drinking habits.

**More information:** Ashlea Bartram et al. 'Why can't I just not drink?' A qualitative study of adults' social experiences of stopping or reducing alcohol consumption, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.12461](#)

Ms Bartram is seeking more Australian men for the next phase of her study, to discuss their experiences of a close friend or family member stopping or cutting back their drinking. All personal information will be kept strictly confidential. For more information, contact [ashlea.bartram@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:ashlea.bartram@adelaide.edu.au) or phone 08 8313 6880.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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