

# Think before you drink

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(HealthDay)—With the traditional flood of holiday parties and festivities approaching, chances to drink excessively increase. So, what to do?

Start by taking a closer look, now, at your [drinking](#) habits, one mental health expert suggests.

"The holidays generate both positive and negative emotions, and drinking is one of the methods that people often use to cope," said Dr. Karen Miotto, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"Overwhelmed from the time-pressured schedules, people may see [alcohol](#) as a shortcut to relax," she said in a UCLA news release. "While there is nothing wrong with enjoying yourself or unwinding, listen to your body and keep yourself safe. A hangover the next day is a large price to pay for a night of letting go with alcohol."

Besides using alcohol to unwind, another common reason people give for drinking is that it helps them get to sleep.

"Alcohol can help people fall asleep faster and sleep more deeply for a while," Miotto said. "But the sedative effects of alcohol can be deceiving because it is associated with decreased quality of sleep and rebound insomnia, a problem that occurs when you discontinue the substance that's been helping you fall asleep."

Some people claim they're not affected by alcohol. Some mistakenly feel they're OK to drive after drinking.

"With habitual, heavy drinking, [people](#) tend to develop tolerance," she said. However, "even if your speech is not slurred, alcohol may still be affecting your motor coordination.

"While it is important to consider safety concerns, another unfortunate consequence of [heavy drinking](#) is a DUI conviction," Miotto said. "A DUI conviction can damage your job prospects and potentially endanger

your career, especially if you are a licensed professional, such as a doctor or nurse."

**More information:** The U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has more on [alcohol consumption](#).

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