

drinkaware

Baseline survey of people's awareness and perceptions of

no and low
alcoholic
drinks



Background

This report summaries qualitative and quantitative research commissioned by Drinkaware and completed by YouGov in October–November 2022 about awareness and perceptions towards no and low alcoholic drinks (alcohol-free and low alcohol drinks, respectively) among UK drinkers.¹

In particular, the research sought to understand:

By how much drinkers in the UK were wishing to reduce their alcohol intake.

By how much drinkers in the UK understood low and alcohol-free drinks and their willingness to consume them.

How low and alcohol-free drinks could work in commonplace settings where alcohol is consumed, and what the benefits were for those who had tried low and alcohol-free drinks.

The influence of marketing and social peers on the take up of low and alcohol-free drinks.



For the baseline research, current guidance (not statutory definitions) in England defines alcohol-free drinks as products with an ABV content not exceeding 0.05% and low alcohol drinks as products with an ABV content not exceeding 1.2%. These drinks are designed to replicate the taste and experience of standard-strength alcoholic drinks and cover a wide range of products, including low and alcohol-free beers, spirits, ciders and wine-based drinks.



0.05% ABV

and under is recommended for labelling drinks as **alcohol-free**.



1.2% ABV

and under is recommended for labelling drinks as **low alcohol**.

¹ Suggested citation: Drinkaware. (2024). Baseline survey of people's awareness and perceptions of no and low alcoholic drinks.

Key takeaways

There is a clear opportunity to support adults to reduce their alcohol consumption through low and alcohol-free drinks.

Work needs to be done to:

Normalise these options and reduce the stigma around consuming them.

Improve the taste and cost (relative to alcoholic drinks).

Promote the health benefits of adopting these options as a moderation technique to achieve a lower-risk alcohol consumption level.

Low and alcohol-free drinks appear to be preferable in different settings.

Low alcohol drinks seem to be more intuitively linked to alcoholic drinks and can represent an alternative to alcoholic drinks when people want to reduce their consumption, especially while continuing to participate in social events.

Alcohol-free drinks seem to be viewed in a similar light to soft drinks and may be favoured by those who do not drink (but can tolerate consuming trace amounts) or who alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks as a way of moderating their consumption.



Methodology



Quantitative research

YouGov surveyed 2,015 drinkers in November 2022.

Figures were weighted and are representative of people who drink at least once monthly by age, gender, social grade and region. Where applicable, comparisons are made to findings from the [2021 Drinkaware Monitor](#).²

The Drinkaware Monitor is a UK representative survey, commissioned by Drinkaware, to find out who's drinking how much and why. The Drinkaware Monitor 2021, which covers the 10 months to July 2021, is the most recent in which respondents were asked about their consumption of low and alcohol-free drinks.

Qualitative research

YouGov completed five online, text-based focus groups in October and November 2022.

Participants were recruited to represent a mix of ages, genders, social grades and drinking behaviours.



2,015

drinkers surveyed and five focus groups completed in late 2022.

² Pearson A., & Slater, E. (2021, October). Drinking through the pandemic. Drinkaware Monitor 2021. PS Research and Drinkaware.

Summary of findings

Propensity to change

30% of respondents wanted to reduce their alcohol consumption either a lot or a little over the next 12 months, increasing to 58% for high-risk drinkers (with an AUDIT-C³ of 8-12).

For those focus group participants who had reduced their drinking in the past, this tended to look like periods of reduced consumption rather than sustained efforts.

Sustained efforts to reduce or stop consumption were largely driven by the financial implications of drinking, medical diagnoses and mental health concerns.



Understanding and use of low and alcohol-free drinks

Few respondents knew the correct definitions of low (16%) and alcohol-free (26%) drinks.

36% of respondents had consumed a low and/or alcohol-free drink in the past 12 months, with slightly more having consumed an alcohol-free drink (31%, compared to 23% for low alcohol).

Around a third of respondents were at least somewhat likely to consume a low (30%) or alcohol-free (34%) drink in the next 12 months, increasing from the 2021 Drinkaware Monitor (22% for low alcohol, 24% for alcohol-free).

³ AUDIT-C is a method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment, developed by the World Health Organisation. It is a shortened version of the 10-question AUDIT and asks three consumption-related questions. A score of 0 to 4 indicates low risk; 5 to 7 indicates increasing risk; 8 to 10 indicates higher risk; and 11 to 12 indicates possible dependence.

Motivators and barriers to drinking low and alcohol-free drinks

Motivators

For those who had consumed a low and/or alcohol-free drink in the past 12 months, **43% said the main reason was because they needed to drive afterwards**, an increase from 32% in the 2021 Drinkaware Monitor. 29% said their main reason was to cut down on alcohol generally.

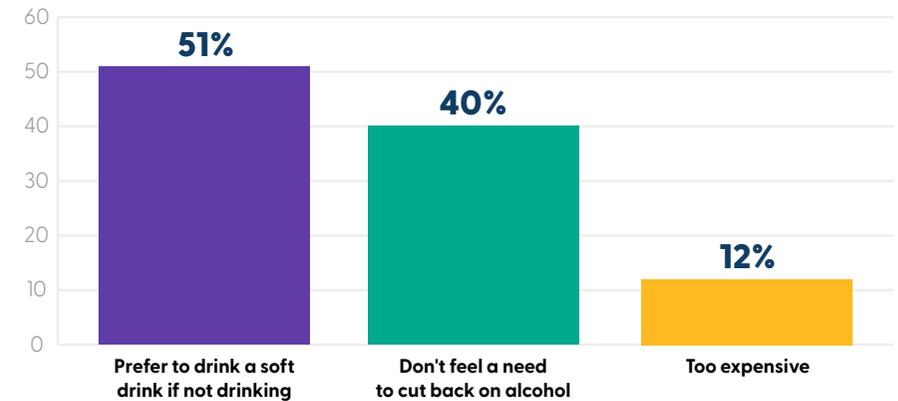
Barriers

Among those drinkers who had never consumed a low or alcohol-free drink (51%) or who hadn't done so in the past 12 months (46%), **drinking a soft drink if not drinking was the preferred choice.**



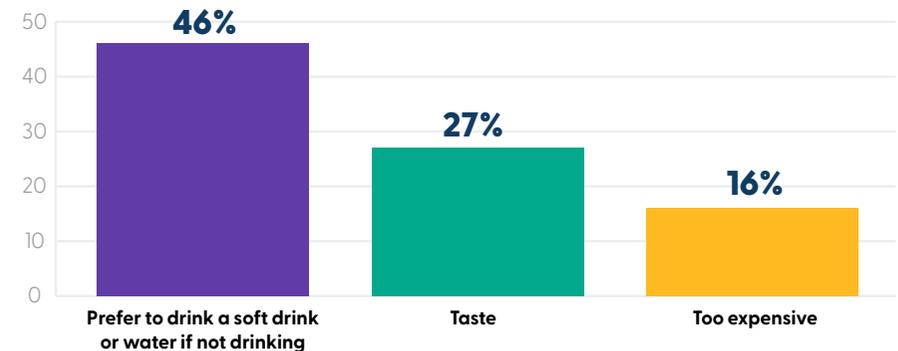
Taste (27%) was the second most common barrier for adults who had not recently consumed a low or alcohol-free drink, while not feeling a need to cut back on alcohol came in second (40%) for those who had never consumed them. Only 16% (not recently consumed) and 12% (never consumed) said low and alcohol-free drinks were too expensive.

Reasons for not ever having a low or alcohol-free drink



Base: All who haven't had a low or alcohol-free drink (n=965)

Reasons for not having a low or alcohol-free drink in the past year



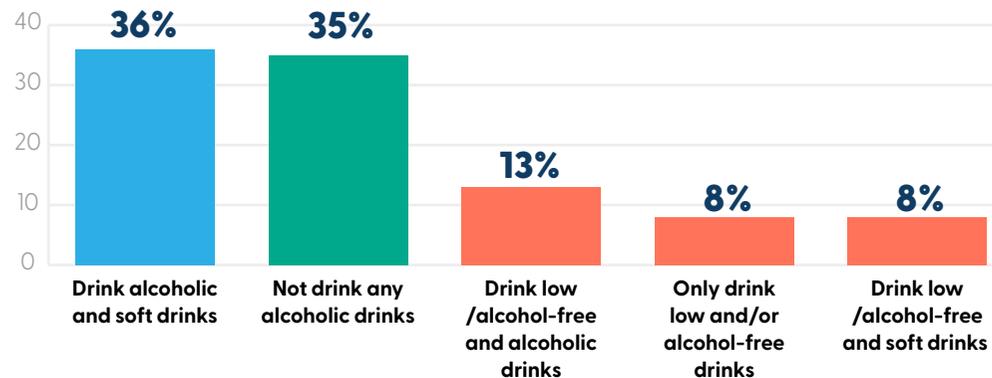
Base: All who consumed a low and/or alcohol-free drink more than 12 months ago (n=546)

Drinking situations for low and alcohol-free drinks



36% of respondents would drink a combination of alcoholic and soft drinks if reducing consumption at a social occasion, followed by 35% who would not drink any alcoholic drinks. 13% would drink a combination of low/alcohol-free and alcoholic drinks, 8% a combination of low/alcohol-free and soft drinks, and 8% only low/alcohol-free drinks.

Approach if cutting down on drinking at a social occasion



Base: All (n=2,015)



When asked what would make them consider drinking a combination of both low/alcohol-free and alcoholic drinks on the same occasion, **37% said taste, while 26% and 25% said cost (if cheaper than alcoholic and soft drinks, respectively).**

25% said nothing would make them consider this, increasing to 32% for the 55+ age group.

Drinking situations for low and alcohol-free drinks

Focus group participants associated alcohol-free drinks with specific circumstances, such as religious, medical or driving reasons, and did not understand the rationale for their consumption, using language such as fake, pointless, boring and a waste of time.

Cost and taste were barriers, with many preferring a soft drink if they decided not to drink.

Focus group participants associated low alcohol drinks more intuitively with alcoholic drinks and could see more of a rationale for their consumption, particularly in social settings. Like alcohol-free drinks, taste was a barrier.

For those who had consumed a low and/or alcohol-free drink, about a third had consumed these in their private home (35%), at a family event (33%) or social event (33%), or at the pub (32%).



Benefits and concerns around low and alcohol-free drinks

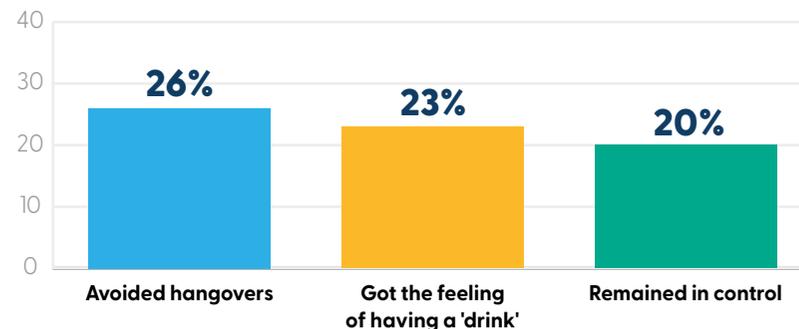
Benefits

For those who had never consumed a low or alcohol-free strength drink, 44% said their benefit was to avoid hangovers, followed by 42% who thought it would help people to reduce their alcohol consumption and 39% who thought it allowed people to remain in control. People at increasing or high risk (AUDIT-C above 5) were more likely to mention health benefits.



For those who had consumed a low and/or alcohol-free drink, 26% said it helped them avoid hangovers, although this decreased to 13% for those aged 55+. 23% said they got the feeling of having a 'drink' and 20% said it helped them remain in control.

Experiences of low and alcohol-free drinks



Base: All who have consumed a low and/or alcohol free drink (n=1,166)

Concerns

While 40% of respondents had no concerns about low or alcohol-free drinks, the most common concern was they don't seem very healthy (21%).

Others were concerned that low alcohol drinks still contained a substantial %ABV and that alcohol-free drinks contained trace amounts of alcohol.

16% were concerned about people being given low alcohol drinks when they require 'no' alcohol drinks and 16% thought low and alcohol-free drinks may act as a gateway. This concern was also shared by some focus group participants who felt the presence of alcohol could be a temptation for people trying to reduce their consumption.

Influence and marketing



19% of respondents said if they saw a friend or colleague drink a low or alcohol-free drink they would be influenced to do the same.

16% and 15% said the same for seeing another family member (not a parent) and a parent, respectively.

Only 7% said they would be influenced by a celebrity or social media influencer.



Peer pressure

Most (56%) respondents said someone encouraged them to drink after they said they did not want to, and 23% were discouraged from drinking a low or alcohol-free drink.

This increased to 33% for those who had consumed a low and/or alcohol-free drink in the past year, and within this group it was higher for younger adults (18-34 years, 41%) compared to the 55+ age group (24%).



Over a third of respondents (35%) saw someone be discouraged from drinking a low or alcohol-free drink and 14% thought someone would react negatively to them if they were seen drinking a low or alcohol-free drink. More young adults (18-34 years, 27%) said this than the 55+ age group (6%).

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