

**Attitudes to own and partner's
drinking among people in couples
where at least one partner drinks
more than recommended
guidelines**

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Method

Drinkaware conducted an online panel survey through Research Now of 2000 adults, all of whom were in a relationship where at least one of the couple was drinking more than the recommended guideline of 14 units a week. The survey was conducted between 28th November 2016 and 6th December 2016. Quotas were set for gender and region for the sample to be UK representative of people in a relationship where at least one of the couple is drinking more than 14 units a week. However, note that this is sample not representative of the national population of couples, as couples where both partners drank less than 14 units a week were excluded. Age quotas were not set: the age distribution of the sample is: 18-34: 10%, 35-54: 33%; 55+: 56%.

Respondents' weekly alcohol consumption was calculated based on their responses to a combination of questions. Whether they drank more than 14 a week was decided by combining responses to question A1 (own frequency of drinking) and C2 (own number of units on typical drinking day) or A2 and C2 (referring to partner's frequency and number of units on typical drinking day) as per the below table, where green = inclusion:

		C1 codes	Units/drinking day				
			1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10+
	A2/A3 codes	Average value	1.5	3.5	5.5	8	14
Frequency	Once/week	1	1.5	3.5	5.5	8	14
	2-3 days	2.5	3.75	8.75	13.75	20	35
	4-5 days	4.5	6.75	15.75	24.75	36	63
	6+ days	6.5	9.75	22.75	35.75	52	91

Findings

Consumption and cutting down

Of the people in couples with at least one person drinking over the guideline, we found:

In 59%, both were drinking over limits.

Assessment of self and partner's alcohol consumption			
	Total	Male	Female
Self over 14 units per week/Partner under 14 units per week	17%	28%	6%
Self under 14 units per week/Partner over 14 units per week	24%	10%	38%
Both over 14 units/week	59%	62%	56%
Base: All respondents	2000	1000	1000

43% want to try to reduce alcohol consumption in the next three months; 35% have a partner planning to do so.

Are you or your partner planning to do any of the following in the next 3 months?		
	Self	Partner
Try to lose weight	60%	47%
Try to reduce alcohol consumption	43%	35%
Try to stop smoking	16%	11%
Not sure	3%	6%
None of the above	24%	30%
Base: All respondents	2000	2000

28% of those whose partner was drinking above guidelines were worried about their partner's consumption but 41% of within-guideline drinkers were worried about their over-guideline partner. Households where both were drinking over the guidelines were less likely to be concerned (23%).

Do any of these concern you with regards to your partner?			
	All those with partner over 14 units/week	Self under 14 units per week/Partner over 14 units per week	Both over 14 units/week
His/Her weight	30%	35%	28%
His/Her alcohol consumption	28%	41%	23%
His/Her blood pressure	23%	29%	20%
His/Her mental wellbeing	14%	18%	12%
His/Her smoking	12%	14%	12%
None of the above	41%	30%	45%
Base: All respondents	1657	476	1181

Attitudes to self and partners drinking

Of all couples surveyed, 33% were worried about alcohol's effect on their physical health and 18% were worried about their partner's risk of alcohol-related illnesses. 21% were worried about alcohol affecting their mental wellbeing; and 8% were worried for their partner. 9% said they were worried about their drinking causing financial troubles and 5% said they were worried about their partner's drinking affecting finances. These figures were higher among 18-34 year-olds: 37% and 10% respectively. 20% said they wouldn't drink as much if it weren't for their partner; 27% of women but only 13% of men; 47% of 18-34s; 23% of those whose partners drank over guidelines.

Among those couples where the respondent drank more than 14 units, there were no significant differences in concern about their own drinking.

**Below are some statements expressed by the people who consume alcohol on a regular basis.
How much do you agree with each of them in relation to you?**

	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-64	65+
I am in control of my alcohol consumption	81%	80%	83%	76%	80%	86%
I feel fine about the amount of alcohol I drink	65%	64%	65%	64%	63%	69%
I feel positive after I had an alcoholic drink	34%	35%	33%	65%	34%	22%
I am worried about alcohol's effect on my physical health	33%	31%	35%	56%	35%	19%
I find it easy to take decisions after I had an alcoholic drink	30%	30%	29%	56%	30%	20%
I am concerned about alcohol affecting my mental wellbeing	21%	21%	22%	44%	23%	10%
I wouldn't drink as much if it wasn't for my partner	20%	13%	27%	47%	21%	9%
My alcohol consumption is affecting my relationships with family / friends	9%	9%	8%	35%	8%	1%
My alcohol consumption causes me financial troubles	9%	10%	8%	37%	8%	1%
Base: All respondents	2000	1000	1000	204	1217	579

Below are some statements expressed by the people who consume alcohol on a regular basis. How much do you agree with each of them in relation to you?

	Total	Self over 14 units per week/ Partner under 14 units per week	Self under 14 units per week/ Partner over 14 units per week	Both over 14 units/week	All those with partner over 14 units/week	All those drinking over 14 units/week
I am in control of my alcohol consumption	81%	78%	87%	80%	82%	80%
I feel fine about the amount of alcohol I drink	65%	62%	76%	61%	65%	61%
I feel positive after I had an alcoholic drink	34%	36%	28%	36%	33%	36%
I am worried about alcohol's effect on my physical health	33%	28%	28%	36%	33%	34%
I find it easy to take decisions after I had an alcoholic drink	30%	30%	30%	29%	30%	29%
I am concerned about alcohol affecting my mental wellbeing	21%	17%	19%	23%	22%	22%
I wouldn't drink as much if it wasn't for my partner	20%	6%	25%	22%	23%	18%
My alcohol consumption is affecting my relationships with family / friends	9%	5%	8%	10%	9%	9%
My alcohol consumption causes me financial troubles	9%	7%	7%	10%	9%	9%
Base: All respondents	2000	343	476	1181	1657	1524

Reasons for concern about partner's drinking

Of those concerned about their above-guideline partners drinking:

- 64% were concerned about alcohol-related illnesses;
- 38% were concerned that they used it to cope with stress;
- 31% were concerned that they were hard to deal with after drinking (37% of men said this and 34% of 64+)
- 27% were concerned about its effect on mental wellbeing;
- 24% were concerned that their partner influenced them to drink more than they should

Which of the below best describes why you are concerned about your partner's alcohol consumption?

	Total	Male	Female	18-34*	35-64	65+
The risk of alcohol-related illnesses	64%	57%	67%	38%	66%	70%
He/she uses it to cope with stress	38%	43%	35%	36%	42%	25%
He/She is hard to deal with when they've been drinking	31%	37%	28%	29%	31%	34%
The effect it has on his/her mental wellbeing	27%	28%	27%	35%	27%	24%
He/She influences me to drink more than I would like	24%	20%	25%	29%	25%	18%
The effect it has on our relationship	26%	26%	26%	22%	27%	25%
The effect it has on our finances	19%	21%	19%	31%	22%	7%
I always have to drive	17%	17%	17%	16%	16%	20%
The effect it has on what he/she can do day-to-day	15%	16%	14%	16%	16%	10%
He/She gets a hangover and ruins the next day	13%	14%	12%	24%	15%	3%
Other	4%	3%	4%	0%	3%	8%
Base: All those concerned about partner drinking over 14 units/week	471	163	308	55*	310	106

*NB low sample size

Which of the below best describes why you are concerned about your partner's alcohol consumption?

	Total	Self under 14 units per week/Partner over 14 units per week	Both over 14 units/week
The risk of alcohol-related illnesses	64%	66%	62%
He/she uses it to cope with stress	38%	39%	37%
He/She is hard to deal with when they've been drinking	31%	29%	32%
The effect it has on his/her mental wellbeing	27%	28%	26%
The effect it has on our relationship	26%	28%	25%
He/She influences me to drink more than I would like	24%	18%	28%
The effect it has on our finances	19%	20%	19%
I always have to drive	17%	23%	12%
The effect it has on what he/she can do day-to-day	15%	14%	15%
He/She gets a hangover and ruins the next day	13%	10%	15%
Other	4%	5%	3%
Base: All those concerned about partner drinking over 14 units/week	471	197	274

Barriers to cutting down

People thought the biggest barriers to them cutting down drinking were:

- Unplanned occasions (41%);
- Planned occasions (33%);
- Stress (34%);
- Easily available alcohol at home (32%)

People thought the biggest barriers to their partner cutting down were:

- Stress (40%);
- Unplanned occasions (30%);
- Planned occasions (33%);
- Easily available alcohol at home (33%)

Thinking about your intention to cut down on alcohol in the next three months, what would be most likely to make you/your partner drink when you hadn't intended to?

	Me	My partner
Unplanned social occasions / celebrations	41%	30%
Stress	34%	40%
Planned social occasions / celebrations	33%	33%
Alcohol easily available at home	32%	33%
Your partner/me drinking alcohol	31%	14%
Boredom	24%	26%
Friends who encourage to drink alcohol	20%	21%
Social pressure	13%	15%
Family problems	13%	13%
Alcohol promotions	8%	5%
Finance problems	6%	8%
None of the above	6%	8%
Other	1%	1%
Base	All those trying to reduce own alcohol consumption in next 3 months (850)	All those with partner trying to reduce alcohol consumption in next 3 months (172)

Overall, respondents felt that men were less likely to support their partner by cutting down. 40% said if “I wanted to cut down, my partner would also drink less to support me”. 45% of men said this compared to 35% of women. Where both are drinking over guidelines, 44% said this. 29% said their partner would not cut down – this rose to 35% among women, whereas only 23% of men felt that their partner would not cut down to support them.

54% said if their partner cut down, they would too: this was higher (59%) among women than men (49%). 18% said they would not drink less if their partner did. This was more common among men than women (23% vs 13%).

Which of the following statements would apply to you and your partner?						
	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-64	65+
If I wanted to cut down my drinking, my partner would also drink less to support me	40%	45%	35%	39%	40%	41%
If I wanted to cut down my drinking, my partner would not change their drinking	29%	23%	35%	27%	28%	32%
If my partner wanted to cut down their drinking, I would also drink less to support them	54%	49%	59%	44%	56%	53%
If my partner wanted to cut down their drinking, I would not change my drinking	18%	23%	13%	22%	15%	22%
Base: All respondents	2000	1000	1000	204	1217	579

Support is a factor in helping people cut down: A third (35%) say providing moral support and encouragement to their partner will help them keep their alcohol consumption low and a quarter (26%) say their partner’s moral support will help them.

Asked how they contribute to their partner’s drinking, 28% of all respondents said they were more likely to suggest one more drink when their partner might think of stopping, 43% said they both drank at the same pace, and 30% said their partner was more likely to suggest one more drink when they might think of stopping. There was a major difference in gender, In all couples and in those couples where both partners drink over 14 units/week, men are more likely than women to suggest one more drink.

Which of these best describes how you and your partner affect each other's alcohol consumption?

	All respondents			Both drinking over 14 units/week		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
I'm more likely to suggest having one more drink when my partner might think of stopping	28%	42%	14%	24%	33%	15%
We drink at the same pace	43%	45%	41%	54%	54%	54%
My partner is more likely to suggest having one more drink when I might think of stopping.	30%	14%	45%	22%	13%	31%
Base	All respondents: 2000	1000	1000	Both partners drinking 15+ units/week : 1181	620	561