

**drinkaware**

# Drinkaware Monitor 2020

**Focus on Wales**



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Drinkaware is a charity providing impartial, evidence-based information, advice and practical resources to help people make better choices about their drinking. To support its work in this area, Drinkaware utilises research and evidence to understand the prevalence of different drinking behaviours within the population, as well as the experiences and attitudes of drinkers.

Every year, Drinkaware conducts research into the drinking attitudes and behaviours of the UK adult population. In 2020, the research was conducted at a time when many people in the UK were living under restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic. The 2020 Monitor therefore provides a unique insight into people's relationship with alcohol (and other health behaviours) during this unprecedented time.

This study was carried out on behalf of Drinkaware by YouGov between 27 August to 15 September 2020. The total sample size was 9,046 UK adults, including 1206 in Wales. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/drinkaware-monitor-2020-drinking-and-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/research-and-evaluation-reports/drinkaware-monitor-2019-drinking-behaviours-and-peer-pressure>

This summary report focuses on the drinking attitudes and behaviours of adults in Wales in comparison to all UK adults aged 18+. The full Drinkaware Monitor 2020 report covers findings for the UK as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

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## State of the nation

Levels of alcohol consumption and frequency of drinking in Wales remain consistent with the UK and those reported in our 2019 Monitor.<sup>2</sup> Forty percent of adults in Wales were drinking two to three times a week or more (37% in 2019) and 19% were drinking four times a week or more (17% in 2019) (Figure 1).

There are also no significant changes in the overall prevalence of harmful drinking as determined by AUDIT-C score.<sup>3</sup> By this measure, just under three-fifths (58%) of the adult population in Wales are classified as low risk (59% in 2019) and a quarter (25%) as increasing risk (26% in 2019). Around one-in-six (16%) are higher risk drinkers (15% in 2019).

Similar to the picture across the UK, men in Wales are significantly more likely than women to be higher risk drinkers (22% vs 10%).

<sup>3</sup> The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C) is a three-question alcohol screening test that identifies individuals drinking at hazardous levels. A risk score is determined by the following brackets: 'low risk' (scoring 0-4 through the AUDIT-C questionnaire); 'increasing risk' drinkers scoring 5-7, and 'higher risk' drinkers scoring 8-12.

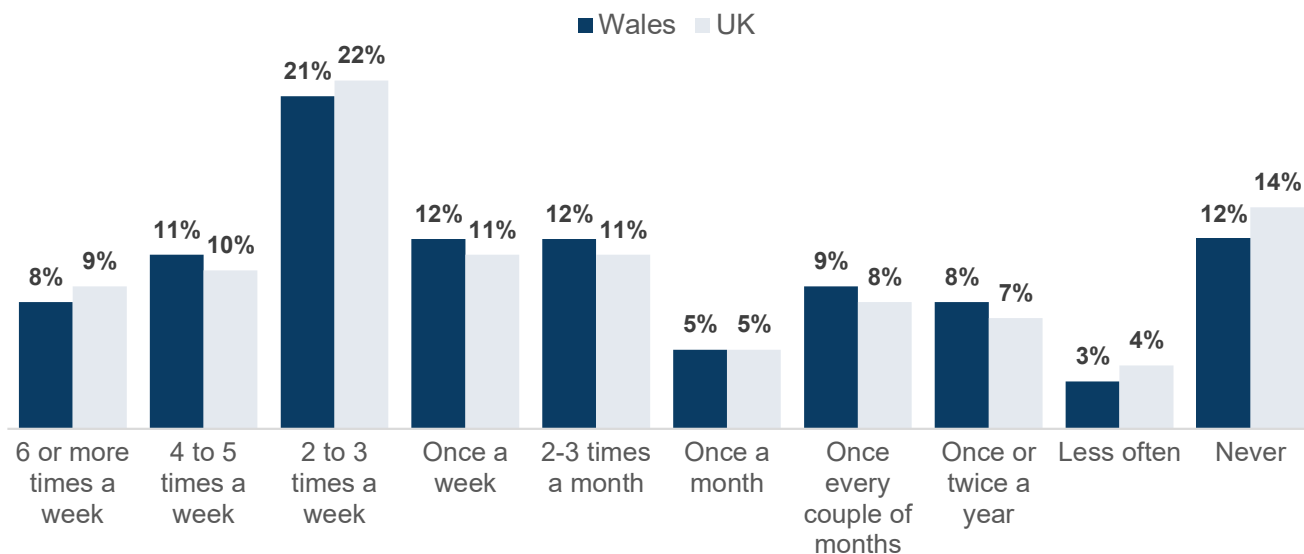


Figure 1: Frequency of drinking alcohol among Wales adults compared to UK adults (Base: Wales adults, n=1,206, UK adults, n=9,046)

### Drinking during lockdown

One of the key aims of the Drinkaware Monitor 2020, was to understand the impact of drinking during lockdown. Just over a quarter (26%) adult drinkers in Wales drank more alcohol than usual during the early stage of lockdown (late March to June) (Figure 2).

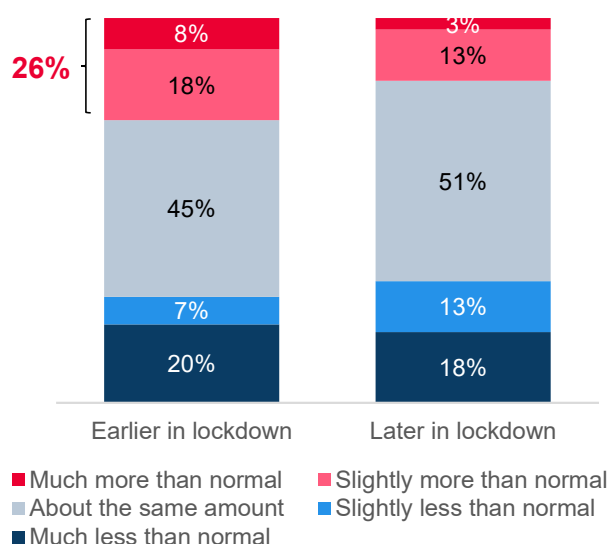


Figure 2: Amount drunk in lockdown compared to normal (Base: All drinkers, n=1,067)

In the latter stage of lockdown (July to August) this reduced substantially to 16% drinking more than usual. Both are comparable to levels observed across the UK (26% vs 15%).

Medium and higher risk drinkers<sup>4</sup> in Wales are the most likely to have drunk more than normal at the early stages (43%) and the later stages of the pandemic (33%) compared to lower risk drinkers (21% and 10% respectively). Their drinking behaviours changed with more drinking on more days of the week than usual (34% compared with 18% of all drinkers in Wales) and drinking earlier in the day than usual (22% compared with 10% of all drinkers).

The most common reasons adults in Wales gave for drinking more during lockdown were:

- Having more time available (53%)
- Less structure to their day or week (52%)
- Drinking more to relieve boredom or for something to do (38%)

The reasons given for drinking less than normal were not seeing friends and family or having social occasions (57%) and not going out or going to venues (54%) both comparable to the UK. Just over a fifth (22%) report trying to improve physical health.

<sup>4</sup> Based on weekly unit consumption. Medium/higher risk drinkers drink more than the UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk

drinking guidelines of 14 units a week. Lower risk drinkers drink within the guidelines.

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## Impact of the pandemic on other health behaviours

Not only did many people use alcohol to cope during lockdown, but one quarter (20%) ate less healthily (UK, 19%) and one third (34%) gained weight (higher than the UK average: 30%).

Across the UK and within Wales we can see that unhealthy behaviours are also linked to alcohol consumption. For example, those who had eaten less healthily and/or gained weight are more likely have been drinking more than usual either in the earlier or later part of lockdown restrictions.

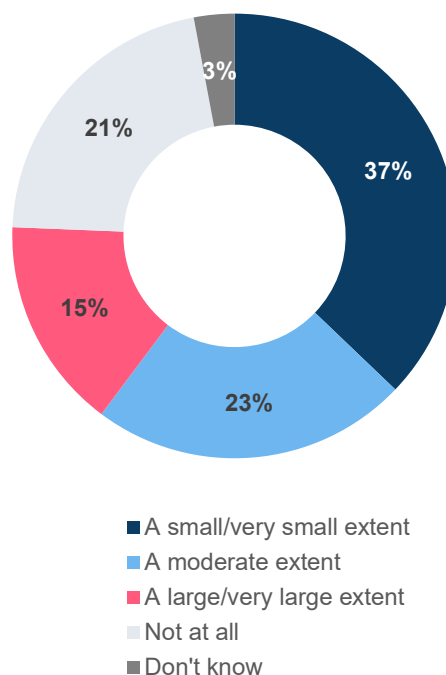
- 26% of those drinking more in early lockdown are eating less healthily vs 17% drinking the same amount or less.
- 48% of those drinking more in early lockdown gained weight vs 30% drinking the same amount or less.

The pattern is consistent during the latter stage of lockdown, with:

- 25% of those drinking more in later lockdown are eating less healthily vs 19% drinking the same amount or less.
- 41% of those drinking more in later lockdown gained weight vs 34% drinking the same amount or less.

The impact of lockdown on people's mental health cannot be understated and the picture in Wales echoes that seen across the UK. For example, approximately one-seventh of all adults in Wales (15%) feel that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health to a large or very large extent.

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Figure 3. Impact of the pandemic on mental health (Base: All adults, n=1,206)

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 4, specific mental health problems have also increased during lockdown with people in Wales experiencing stress (44%), anxiety (44%) and depression (41%) compared to before the pandemic. These levels are comparable to the total UK (stress, 43%; anxiety, 42%; depression, 40%).

In addition, similar to the rest of the UK, women in Wales are more likely than men to have experience mental health issues as a result of the pandemic. For example, stress (49% vs 40%), anxiety (49% vs 39%) and problems sleeping (43% vs 32%).

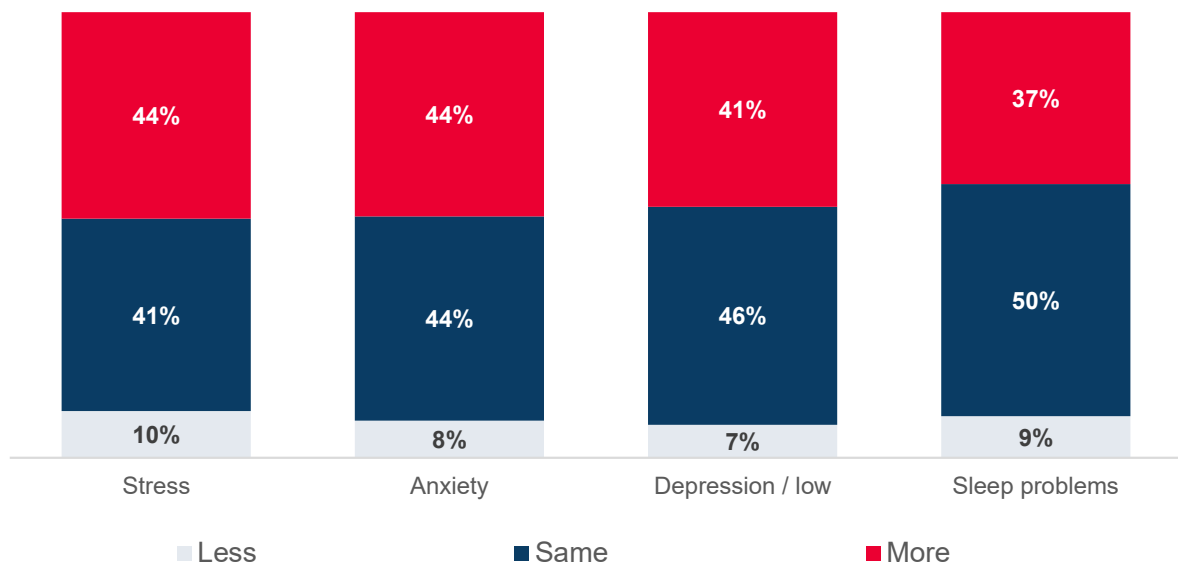


Figure 4: Experience of changes to mental health during lockdown (Base: All adults, n=1,206)

## Intention to cut back

Respondents were also asked if they intended to change their drinking as lockdown restrictions eased compared to during the lockdown. While just under half (52%) intend to continue drinking the same amount as during lockdown, just over a quarter (21%) intend to cut down on their drinking compared to during lockdown.

The most popular moderating strategies for all adult drinkers in Wales were taking drink-free days (63%), avoiding drinking alcohol on a 'school or work night' (50%) and drinking within the guidelines (44%).

## Summary

This year, the drinking attitudes, and behaviours of adults in Wales generally mirrors that of the UK adult population, particularly that of England. Where Scotland and Northern Ireland saw slightly lower levels of drinking frequency and consumption, Wales directly mirrored England.

Like many people across the UK, many adults in Wales turned to alcohol to help them through the pandemic, particularly the earlier stages. Not only were many drinking more than normal, they were also eating more unhealthy foods and putting on weight. In addition, like across the UK, people in Wales also experienced a greater level of stress, anxiety and depression than before the pandemic.