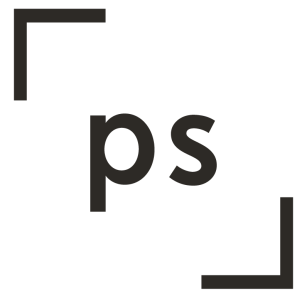


# Let's talk about drinking

**2023 Drinkaware Monitor**

**Research Report: November 2023**



**drinkaware**

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# Introducing the research

## Monitor and qualitative research

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# Introducing the report

## Introducing the research

This report brings together two key research sources to look at drinking in the UK:

**Monitor** - a UK representative survey to find out who's drinking, how much and why

**Qualitative research** - individual interviews and focus groups with 29 UK adults to gather more in-depth feedback around the conversations people are having about alcohol

## What does the report cover?

This report looks at the state of UK drinking and topics such as concerns, conversations, health and public attitudes.

## What doesn't the report cover?

The Drinkaware Monitor 2023 survey covers more topics than are covered in this report. For example, the survey asks more questions about alcohol screening and drink spiking. The full data tables and an interactive library of historical Monitor data will be published on the Drinkaware website in Winter 2023. Drinkaware welcomes secondary analysis of its data, please contact [research@drinkaware.co.uk](mailto:research@drinkaware.co.uk). The [technical report](#)<sup>1</sup>, produced by YouGov, includes a copy of the questionnaire.

## Acknowledgements

Drinkaware would like to thank YouGov for conducting the survey; PS Research for analysing the survey data, conducting and analysing the qualitative research, and for writing this report; and the participants of the qualitative research for giving their time and being so open and honest.

## How to cite this report

Pearson A., & Slater, E. (2023, November). Let's talk about drinking. Drinkaware Monitor 2023. PS Research and Drinkaware.

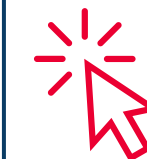
### Viewing the charts

Many of the analysis charts in this report are interactive.



#### Hover

Hover over bars or maps to display data and hover over legend labels to highlight one set



#### Select

Click on a legend label to select or de-select data in the chart you are viewing

# Understanding the language

Throughout the report a number of technical terms are used to analyse the results of the Monitor. A [glossary](#) is included in the Appendix.

The most commonly used are:

We have used [the Cabinet Office's advice for writing about ethnicity](#). When analysing findings by ethnicity, we use the term 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all ethnic groups except any white categories, including white British.

[AUDIT and AUDIT-C](#) are methods of screening for excessive drinking developed by the World Health Organization<sup>2</sup>. AUDIT is a 10-question method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment.

The **Index of Multiple Deprivation** is a [measure of relative deprivation](#) for small areas (neighbourhoods) across the UK<sup>3</sup>. Throughout the report, analysis by deprivation refers to the 'least deprived' and 'most deprived' areas. These are based on Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles, with the 'least deprived' being those living in areas in the lowest 20% of deprivation and 'most deprived' being those who live in areas in the highest 20% of deprivation.

**Social Grades** are reported using a classification system based on occupation (AB are managerial and professional occupations; DE are semi and unskilled manual workers)<sup>4</sup>

Where differences between sub-groups and changes over time are discussed in this report, only those differences that are statistically significant are reported (unless otherwise stated). These differences are statistically significant to a confidence level of 95%. Please also note that throughout the report we use rounded percentages. Figures may not always sum to 100% due to this rounding, but will remain within a percentage point.

# Drinkaware Monitors



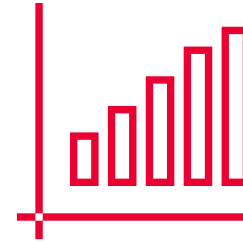
## What is the Monitor?

Drinkaware is committed to ensure our work is informed by up-to-date evidence on UK drinking attitudes and behaviours.

Every year, Drinkaware commissions a representative survey to understand the UK's drinking behaviours and motivations. A core subset of questions are included in the questionnaire every year to understand changes in key variables over time. Other questions are developed to reflect that year's theme.

Since 2017, the Monitors have been conducted by YouGov on behalf of Drinkaware, and before that by Ipsos Mori (2009-14). Where appropriate, findings from the 2023 Monitor have been reported in the context of those from previous waves.

Drinkaware welcomes secondary analysis of its data, please contact the research team on [research@drinkaware.co.uk](mailto:research@drinkaware.co.uk) to find out more.



## Monitor Methodology

- UK wide sample of 10,473 adults aged 18 to 85 were interviewed, including 6,948 in England, 1,302 in Wales, 1,565 in Scotland and 658 in Northern Ireland
- The sample was drawn from the YouGov research panel, with responses collected during July 2023
- Using data from the Office for National Statistics, the results were weighted to be representative of the UK adult population according to age, gender, social grade and region
- The sampling and weighting process is exactly consistent with that used in previous Drinkaware Monitors
- When compared to population-level sales data, self-reported surveys typically underestimate population alcohol consumption by between 30% and 60%.

More information on the Methodology can be found in the [technical report](#)<sup>1</sup>.

# Qualitative research approach: an overview



In summer 2023, Drinkaware commissioned PS Research to conduct qualitative research to gather views from the general public about the conversations people are having (or want to have) with other people about their drinking.

## Methodology:

- Four focus groups lasting approximately 90 minutes; each group had 4-5 participants
- Ten individual in-depth conversations lasting between 30-50 minutes and conducted over an online video platform
- All focus groups and interviews took place between 2nd - 16th October 2023



**Participants:** A total of **29 participants** took part in the research. Minimum quotas were set on gender, age, ethnicity and SEG to ensure a mix of participants. Participants were recruited from all regions of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

Participants had to belong to one of the following groups:

- Been concerned about the drinking of a close friend or relative in the last 12 months and had a conversation about this with them
- Been concerned about the drinking of a close friend or relative in the last 12 months and either not mentioned these concerns to them or made a comment about these concerns but not had a conversation about this
- High risk drinkers (based on the AUDIT-C questionnaire) who have had a conversation with a relative, friend or health professional in the last 12 months because they were concerned about their drinking or where they had suggested that they cut down

All names used in case studies in this report are fictitious.

# What did we find in 2022?



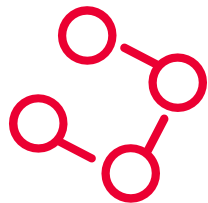
**There was no significant change in how often UK adults drink alcohol or the amount of alcohol being consumed in a typical day/week since 2021**

- But the number of UK drinkers who were binge drinking was rising, particularly amongst younger adults
- Understanding of government low risk drinking guidelines was low, but those who understood the guidelines did not necessarily drink less alcohol



**The drinking of other people was having a negative impact on many UK adults**

- Three in ten UK adults were concerned about someone else's drinking
- The drinking of a partner, close friend or relative was most likely to have a negative impact when they regularly drink to excess



**Drinking behaviours are interdependent with other factors**

The research identified that lifestage, social life, people around you and demographics influence drinking habits and that drinking habits have an impact on health and life satisfaction, other risky behaviours and the people around you.



# Highlights

## Summary of key findings

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# There are some encouraging trends around drinking in the UK



Whilst the proportion of non-drinkers in the UK has not changed in the last year, **drinkers appear to be drinking less frequently**: 39% drink alcohol less often than weekly compared to 33% in 2019.



UK drinkers are **increasingly drinking within low risk drinking guidelines**, set by the UK Chief Medical Officers, of 14 units per week.



There has been a **significant fall in people drinking at home alone** (but if they do drink at home alone it is likely that they do it regularly).



**But those struggling the most financially were most likely to have changed their drinking habits over the last 12 months due to the cost of living crisis**

One in ten drinkers struggling financially report drinking more alcohol in the last year whilst four in ten have been drinking less.

# Different life stages impact on people's drinking habits

We see significant differences by age across key drinking behaviours

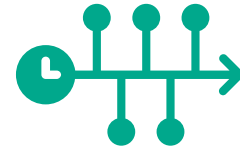


**18 to 34**

Younger age groups are more likely to drink the **least often** or **not at all**

**BUT**

If they do drink, they are more likely to **binge drink**, particularly monthly or less often



**35 to 54**

Drink **more often than younger adults**, although not as much as the older age group

**BUT**

The proportion **binge drinking weekly or more often has fallen** to the lowest it has ever been



**55 and over**

This is the age group that drinks the **most often**, drinking on more days than anyone else

**BUT**

When they do drink, **they drink less**

# The majority of UK drinkers think they 'drink responsibly'

And they tend not to worry about their drinking



**9 in 10**

Agree that they 'drink responsibly'



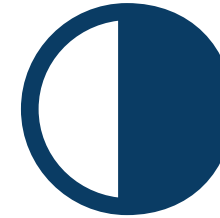
**3 in 5**

Never worry about their drinking



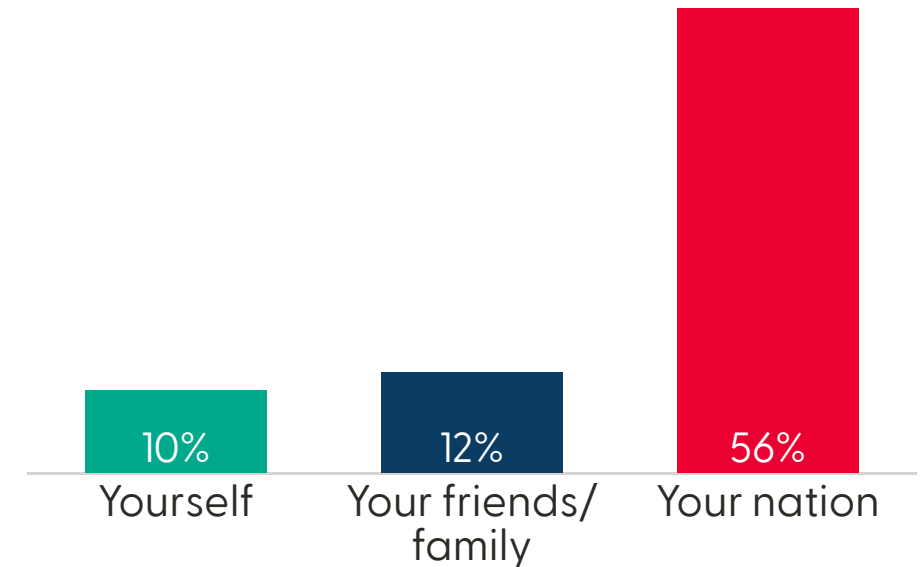
**4 in 5**

Feel it is unlikely that they will have future health problems as a result of their drinking



**UK drinkers are much more likely to feel the nation has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol compared to themselves and their friends/family**

% selecting unhealthy



# But one in four UK adults are concerned about someone else's drinking

Although this is lower than in 2022 (26% down from 29%)



## Concern is most likely to be for a friend's drinking

36% of those with a concern indicate it relates to a friend, rising to 44% amongst males



## UK adults are less comfortable having a conversation with friends or family about their drinking

Only 29% would feel very comfortable starting a conversation with family and 24% with friends, compared to 45% with a partner



One in five people who are concerned about someone else's drinking have not said anything or taken any action



## When it comes to their own drinking...

One in ten (11%) UK drinkers report that family, friends or a health professional have expressed concern about their drinking

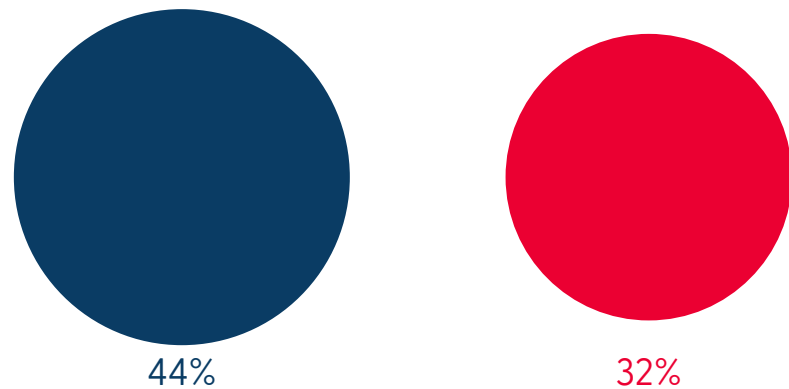
# Meaningful conversations about alcohol matter

A third (35%) of people who had a concern raised about their drinking indicated that they made changes as a result



## Starting a conversation about someone's drinking is more effective than just making a comment

% of those who had a concern raised about their drinking indicating that they took actions as a result



- Someone had a conversation with them
- Someone just made a comment



The qualitative research revealed that comments may be a pre-cursor to having a more-in depth conversation.

Participants in the qualitative research often described these conversations as difficult and emotional, and feel that ultimately the impact of the conversations largely depend on how willing the person is to accept that they may be drinking in a harmful or problematic way.

# The headlines from the qualitative research (1)

## What did we learn about the conversations people are having over concerns for someone else's drinking?



Although the findings in the quantitative Monitor data suggest most people say they would feel comfortable about starting a conversation with someone because they are concerned about their drinking, the qualitative research found that actually **having these conversations can be difficult and emotional.**



The qualitative research revealed that some of the **key barriers** that may prevent people from initiating a conversation about their concerns are:

- expecting denial or an argument
- the conversation feels pointless
- not knowing how to broach the subject
- fear of damaging relationships
- they don't feel it is their place
- they are not 100% sure there is a problem



**Denial** and **defensiveness** are the most common reactions during initial conversations from the person whose drinking is a concern, particularly if the person is not expecting this conversation and feels 'ambushed'.

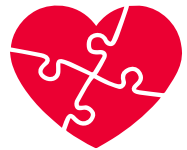


**Challenging perceptions** of what constitutes 'problematic drinking' may help in overcoming defensiveness and denial. It can also be helpful to forewarn the person about the conversation to allow them time to digest the concerns.

## The headlines from the qualitative research (2)



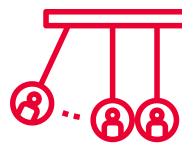
Participants who have had conversations with people because they are concerned about their drinking often use **different strategies** to try to get the person to see that their drinking may be problematic, including being accusatory, being supportive or providing 'evidence' about their drinking habits or behaviours.



Strategies used differ depending on the relationship and on how problematic their drinking is deemed to be, and some people have used **multiple strategies during multiple conversations**.



Conversations often **focus on how often or how much someone is drinking** and the impact of this, but less often on the reasons why people feel the need to drink in this way.



Conversations can have an **impact** on the person's drinking, or on their perceptions of their drinking, although this **may take some time** and may only occur after having multiple conversations.



Ultimately, the impact of the conversations seems to largely depend on **how open the drinker is to accepting that their drinking may be harmful or problematic**.



# Drinking in the UK in 2023

## Alcohol consumption and comparisons

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# Drinking in the UK in 2023: **what to look out for**



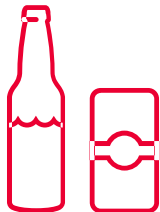
Overall drinking levels have remain unchanged for the last two years and the proportion of UK adults who do not drink has not changed



But UK drinkers appear to be drinking less frequently when we look back further over time: 39% drink alcohol less often than weekly compared to 33% in 2019



More UK drinkers are drinking within the UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units per week, however levels of high risk drinking (AUDIT) have remained the same



Occasional binge drinking (less than monthly) has been on the rise for the last two years, with younger drinkers more likely to binge drink

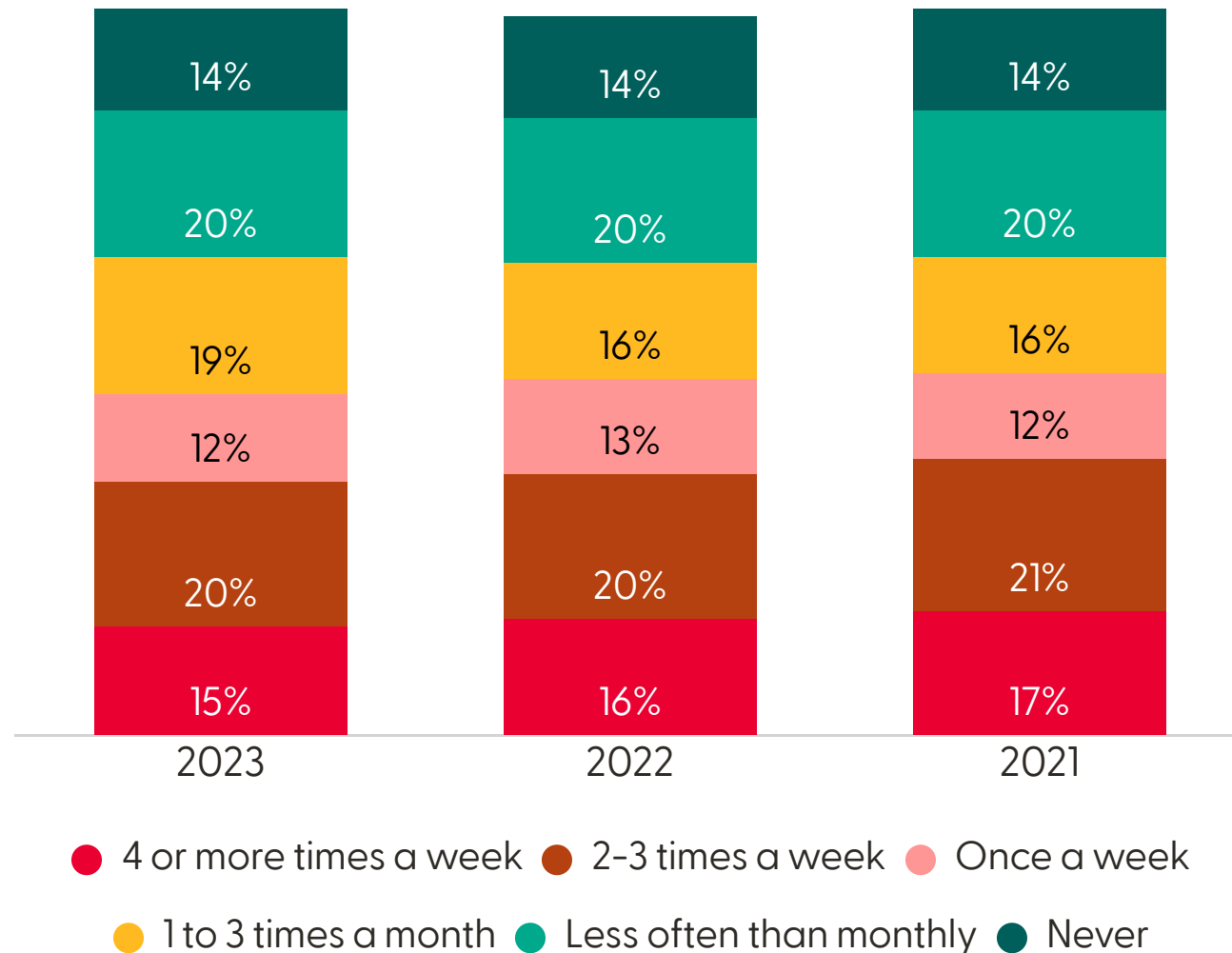


There has been a significant drop in people drinking at home alone, but if they do drink at home alone it is likely that they do it regularly

# How often do UK adults have a drink containing alcohol?

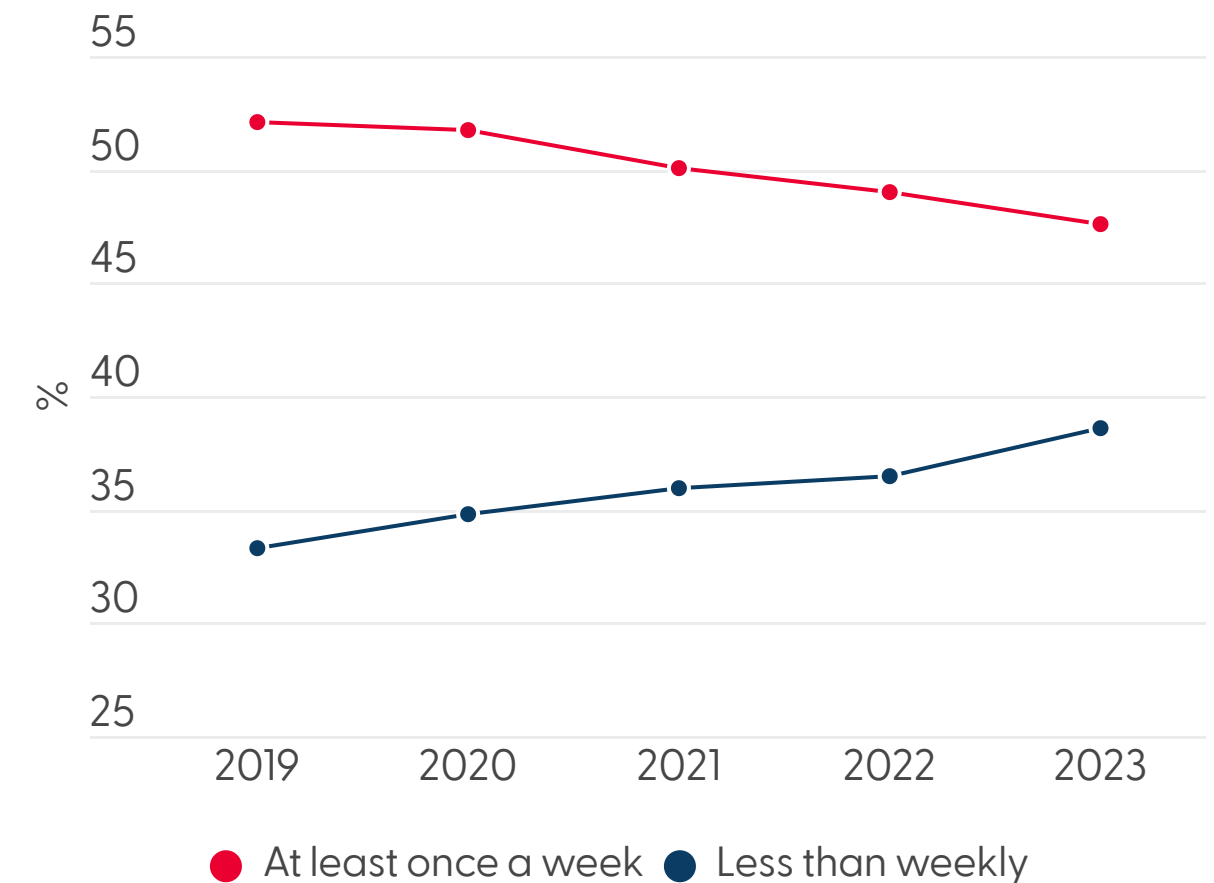
Drinking levels in 2023 appear very similar to 2022 and 2021 and the proportion of non-drinkers has not changed

Previous Monitor reports<sup>2</sup>



But there is some evidence that we are drinking less frequently when we look back further

Those drinking alcohol less often than weekly is up from 33% in 2019 to 39% in 2023



Drinking frequency. Base: all UK adults, 2023 (n=10,473); 2022 (n=6,318); 2021 (n=9,137); 2020 (n=9,046), 2019 (n= 2,145)

# Who are more likely to drink alcohol less frequently?



**44% of female adults drink alcohol less often than weekly**

Compared to 32% of male adults in the UK



**42% of parents of children under the age of 18 drink alcohol less often than weekly**

Compared to 35% of UK adults with children over the age of 18 and 40% of those who are not a parent/guardian



**Adults who live with their parents or siblings are also more likely to drink less often than weekly**

44% report drinking alcohol less often than weekly, compared to 37% who live with a spouse or partner

**If someone has a physical or mental health issue, they also tend to drink less frequently**



**Mental health**

43% of UK adults with a severe PHQ\* mental health rating<sup>6</sup> drink alcohol less often than weekly, compared to 36% with a normal rating



**Long-term health problem or disability**

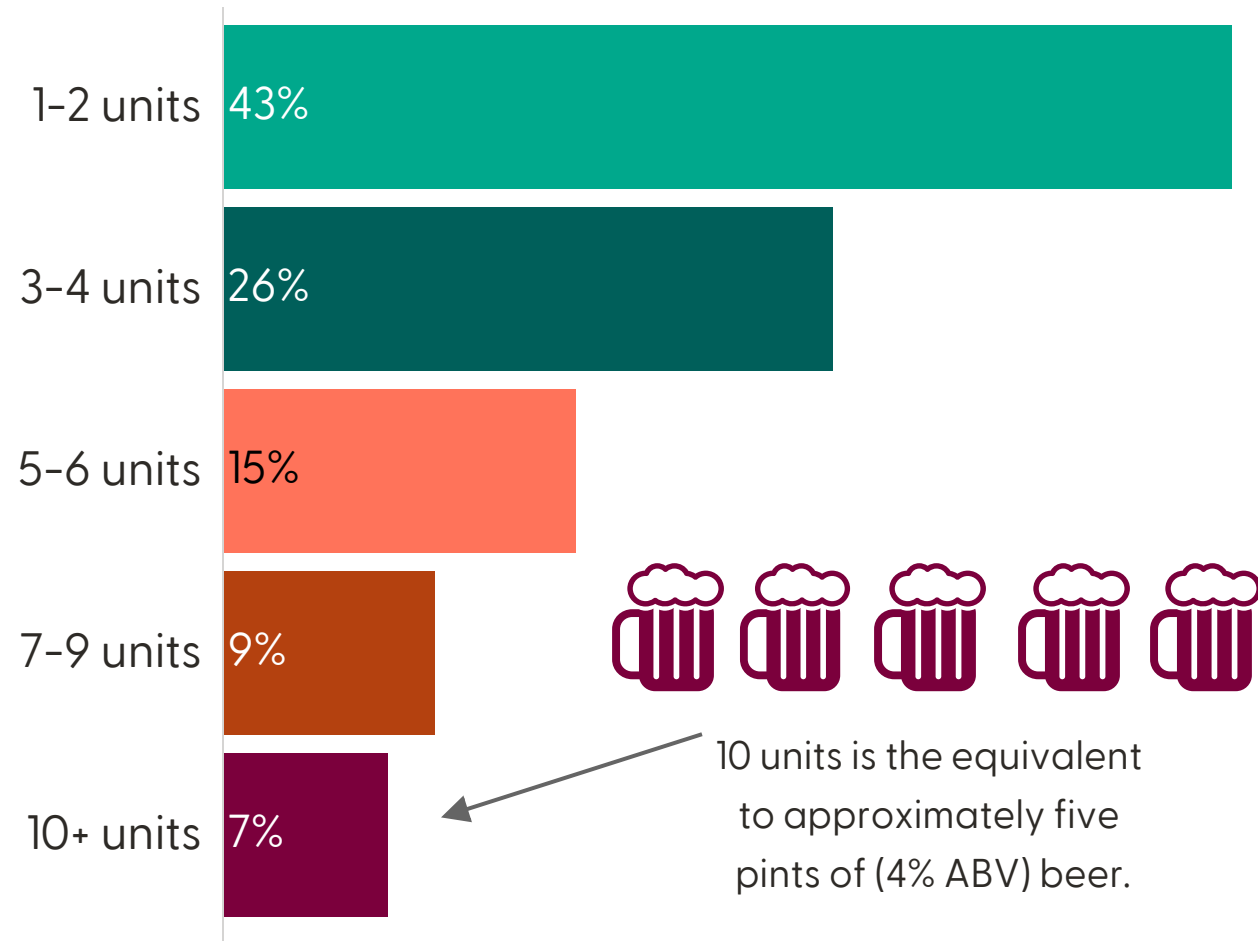
45% of UK adults with a health problem or disability that limits them a lot drink alcohol less often than weekly, compared to 37% of adults with no limiting health problem or disability

\*The [Patient Health Questionnaire \(PHQ\)](#) is a self-administered version of a diagnostic instrument for screening and measuring the severity of common mental disorders and depression.

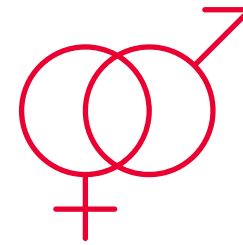
# How many units of alcohol are drunk in a typical day when drinking?

**Four in ten UK drinkers (43%) consume 1-2 units in a typical day when drinking**

Breakdown of units in a typical day in 2023



Units in a typical day. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=9,035)



**Not only do males drink more often, when they do drink they drink more in a day**

11% of male drinkers drink ten or more units in a typical drinking day, compared to 3% of female drinkers

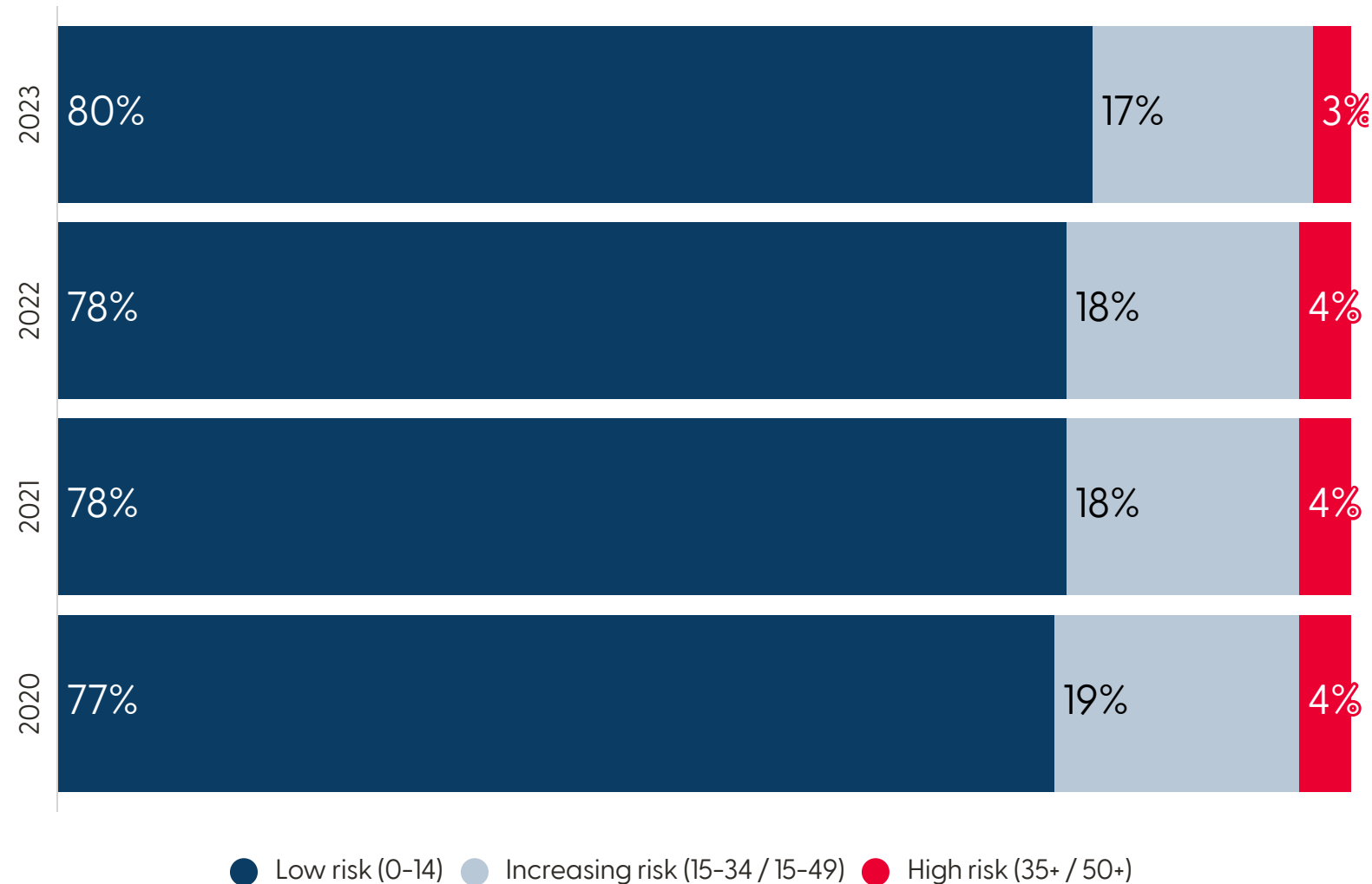


**Those with a severe mental health rating drink less often, but when they do they tend to drink more in a day**

10% of drinkers with a positive depression screen drink ten or more units in a typical drinking day, compared to 6% with a normal score

# The number of UK drinkers drinking within weekly guidelines is rising

Four in five UK drinkers (80%) drink within the UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units per week<sup>7</sup>, up from 77% in 2020



## Useful to know

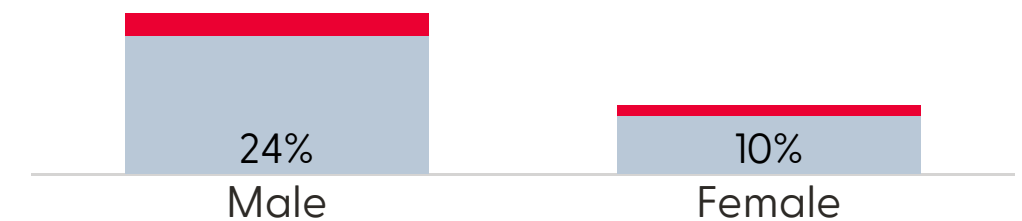
Weekly units of alcohol are grouped into three risk categories: low, increasing and high. Low risk is 0 to 14 units while increasing and high risk differs by gender:

- **Women** who drink between 15 and 34 units are increasing risk, 35+ are high risk
- **Men** who drink between 15 and 49 units are increasing risk, 50+ are high risk

'Risk' refers to risk of harm from alcohol



A higher proportion of males are drinking beyond the low-risk guidelines, and are classified as increasing- or high-risk drinkers



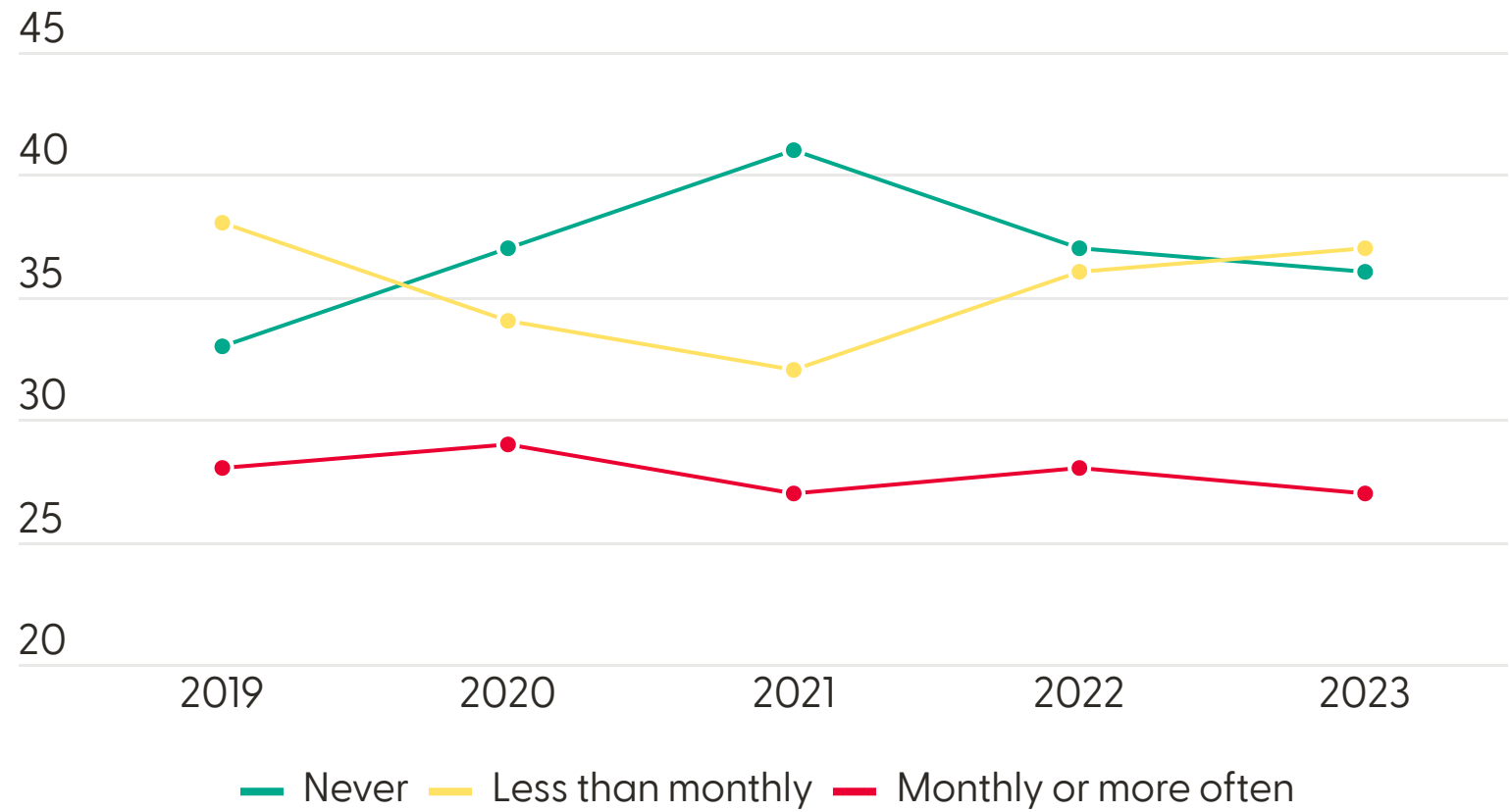
- Increasing risk (15-34 / 15-49)
- High risk (35+ / 50+)

Weekly units score. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol: 2023 (n=9,035); 2022 (n=5,428); 2021 (n=7,911); 2020 (n=7,834)

# How often do UK drinkers binge drink?

**Levels of binge drinking are very similar to 2022 (drinking more than 6/8 units\* in a single occasion)**

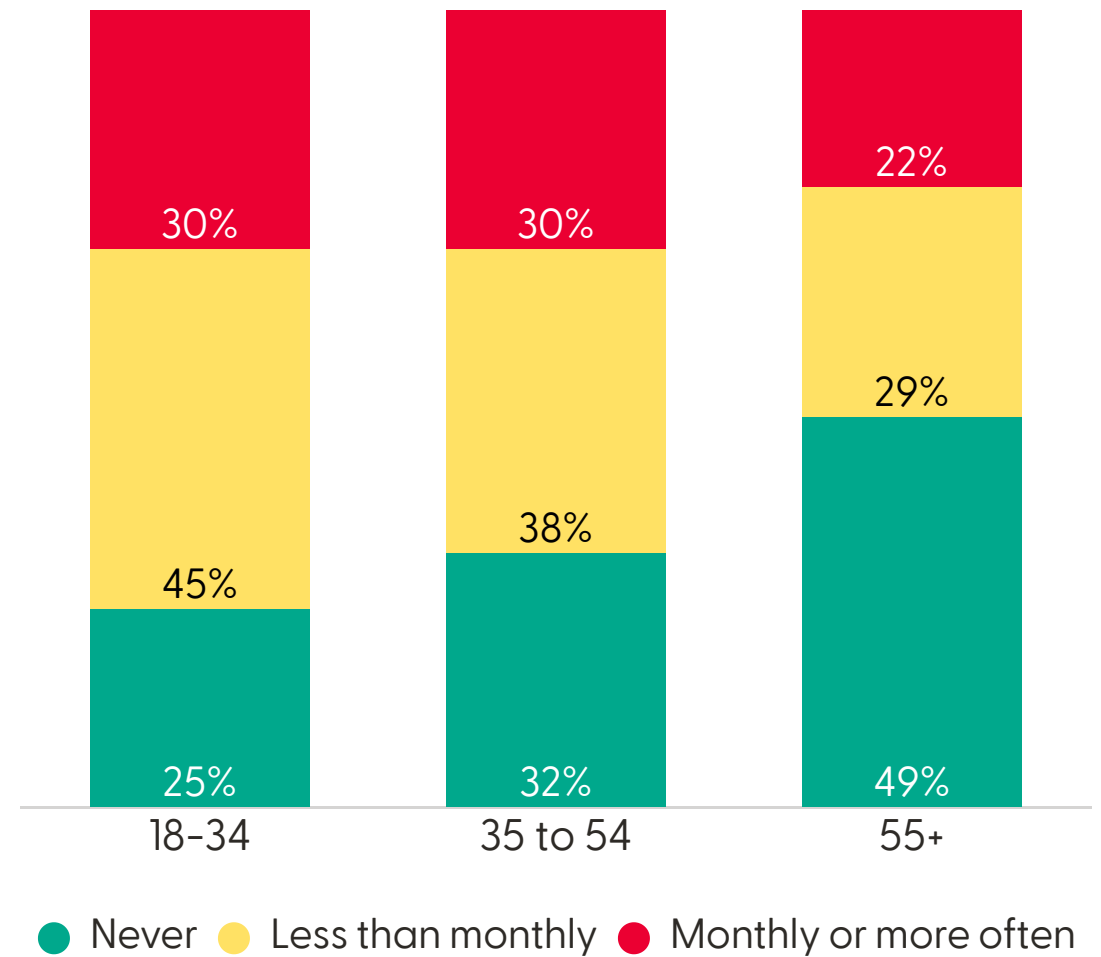
After a year-on-year rise in UK drinkers who never binge drink from 2019 to 2021, this has been dropping for the last two years with a corresponding increase in more occasional binge drinking



\*6 units for females; 8 units for males  
 Frequency binge drinking. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol, 2023 (n=9,035); 2022 (n=5,428); 2021 (n=7,911); 2020 (n=7,834), 2019 (n=2,145)

**Younger drinkers are more likely than older age groups to binge drink**

Three in four 18-34 year olds have done so in the last year, compared to half of those aged 55+



# Drinking behaviours can be used to assess risk of harm from alcohol

The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)<sup>2</sup> is a series of questions used to understand someone's alcohol use.

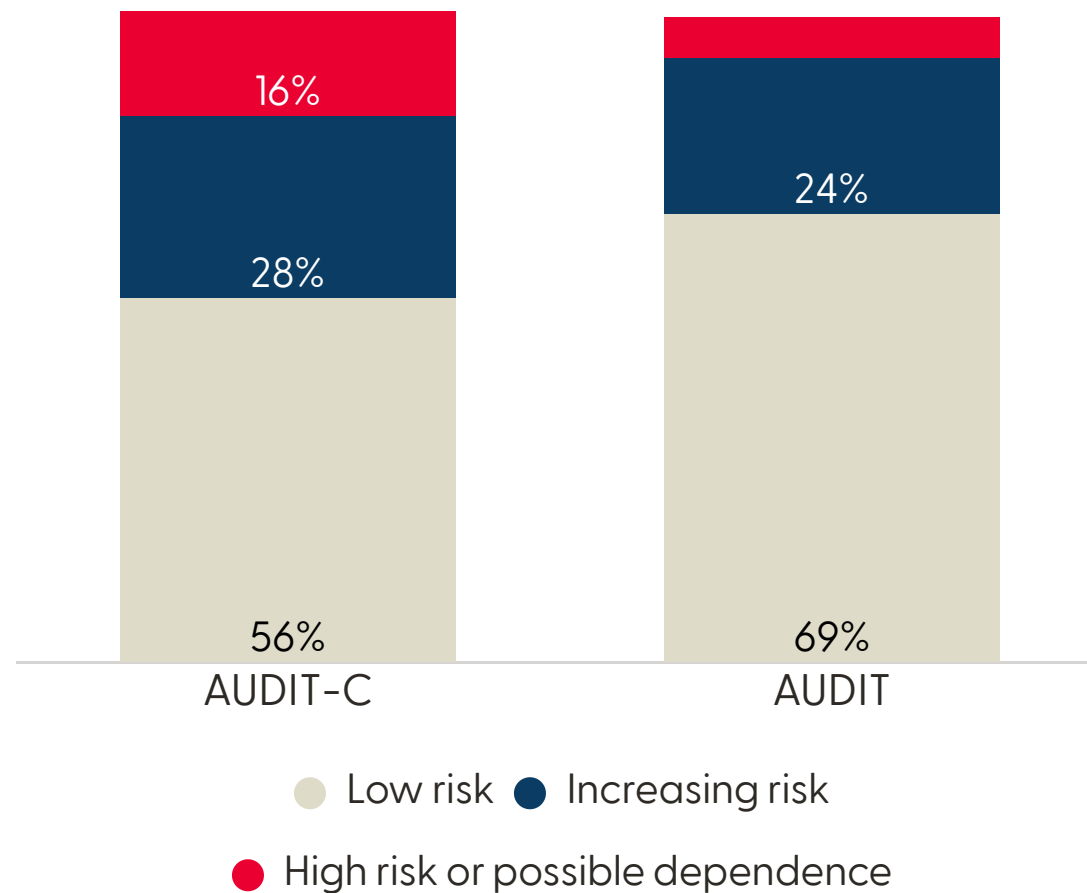
The AUDIT was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a simple, 10-question method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment.

The AUDIT assesses three domains: alcohol intake, dependence, and adverse consequences. Each item receives a score of 0–4, with a total possible score of 40.

A score of 0–7 indicates low risk, 8–15 indicates increasing risk, 16–19 indicates higher risk and a score of 20 or more indicates possible dependence.

The AUDIT-C is a shortened version of the 10-item AUDIT and asks the three consumption-related questions only. 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.

## How levels of risk amongst drinkers compare between AUDIT-C screening and the full AUDIT assessment



Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=9,035)



## AUDIT Risk Classifications

### Low risk

Low risk of causing future harm to themselves

### Increasing risk

Drinking at a level that increases the risk of damaging their health and could lead to serious medical conditions

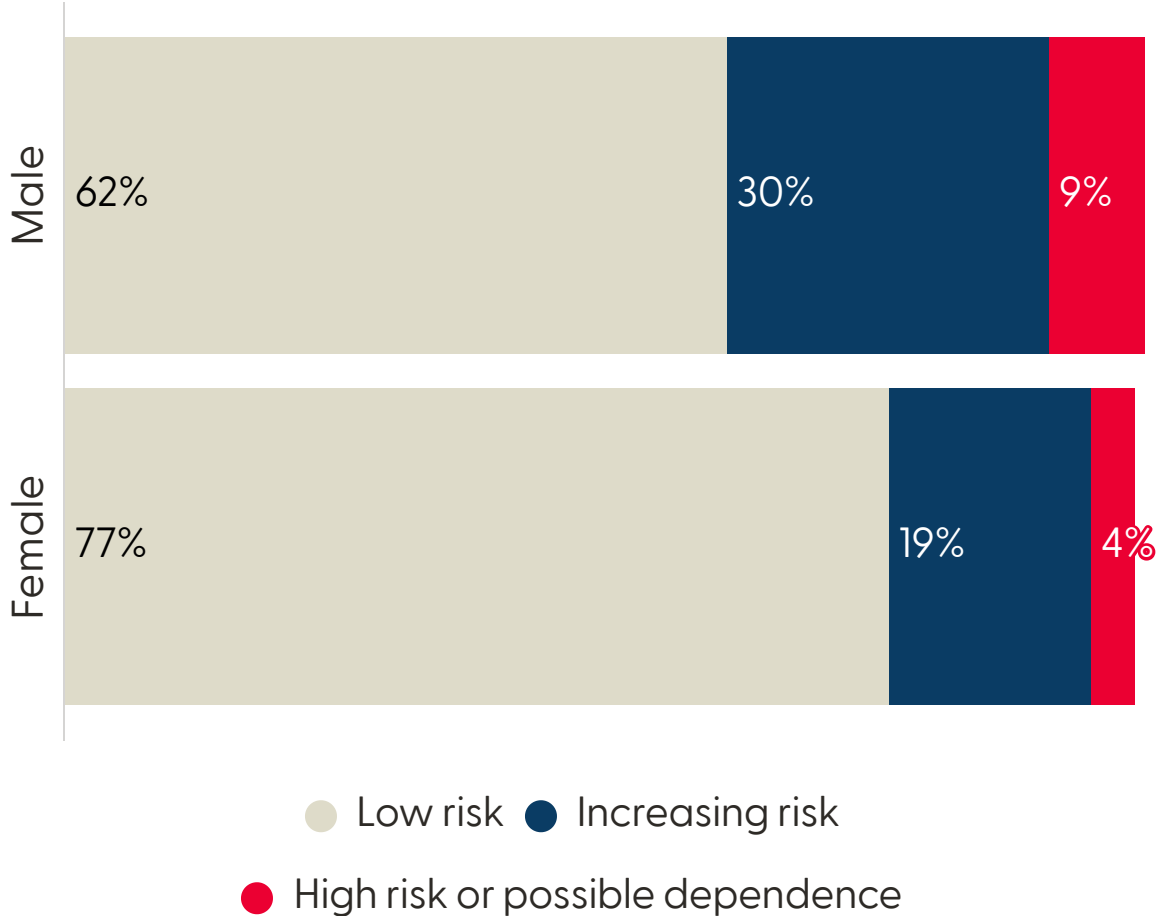
### High risk (or possible dependence)

This level of drinking has the greatest risk of health problems



# Male drinkers are more likely to be drinking to risky levels

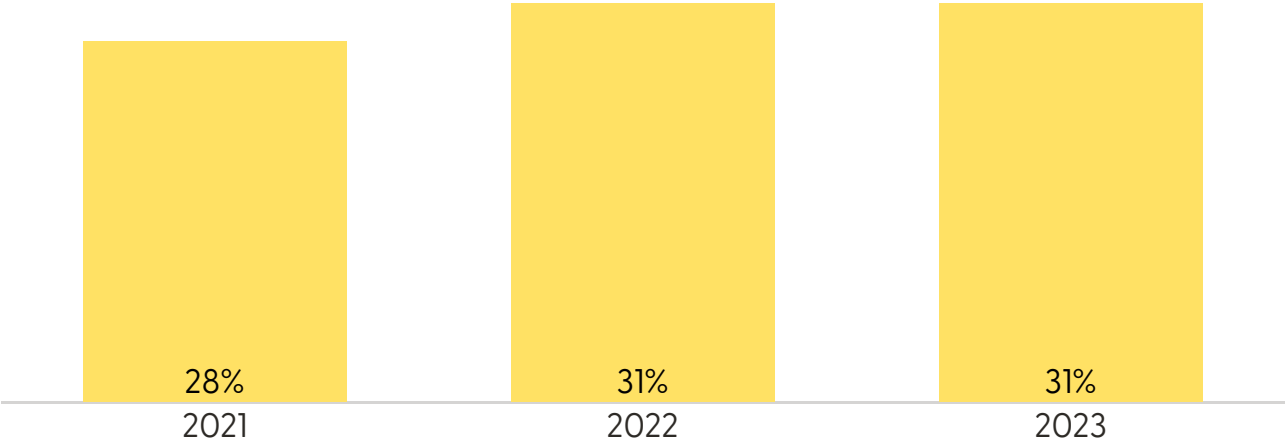
Male drinkers are more likely to be high or increasing risk on the full AUDIT than female drinkers



AUDIT. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol, Males (n=4,324); Females (n=4,711)

The proportion of drinkers who are drinking to increasing or high risk levels has remained the same over the last year

% of UK drinkers who are increasing risk, high risk or possible dependence (based on the full AUDIT assessment)



High risk drinking amongst the 18 to 34 age group has fallen over the last year

8% of 18-34 year old drinkers are high risk or possibly dependent drinkers, down from 14% in 2022

# Who appears most likely to be a high risk drinker?

All data based on the full AUDIT assessment - high risk includes possible dependence



## Males

9% of male drinkers are high risk or possibly dependent, compared to 4% of female drinkers



## 18 to 24 year olds

11% of 18 to 24 year olds who drink alcohol are high risk or possibly dependent, compared to 4% of drinkers aged 55+



## Ethnic minority groups

10% of drinkers from an ethnic minority background are high risk or possibly dependent, compared to 6% of white drinkers



## Live with friends or housemates

12% of drinkers who live with friends / housemates are high risk or possibly dependent, compared 5% who live with a spouse or partner



## Mental health issues

14% of drinkers with a positive depression screen (PHQ assessment) are high risk or possibly dependent, compared to 3% of drinkers with a normal PHQ score



## Drinkers are much more likely to be high risk if alcohol is important to their social life

18% of drinkers who consider alcohol important to their social life are high risk or possibly dependent, compared to 2% who feel it is unimportant



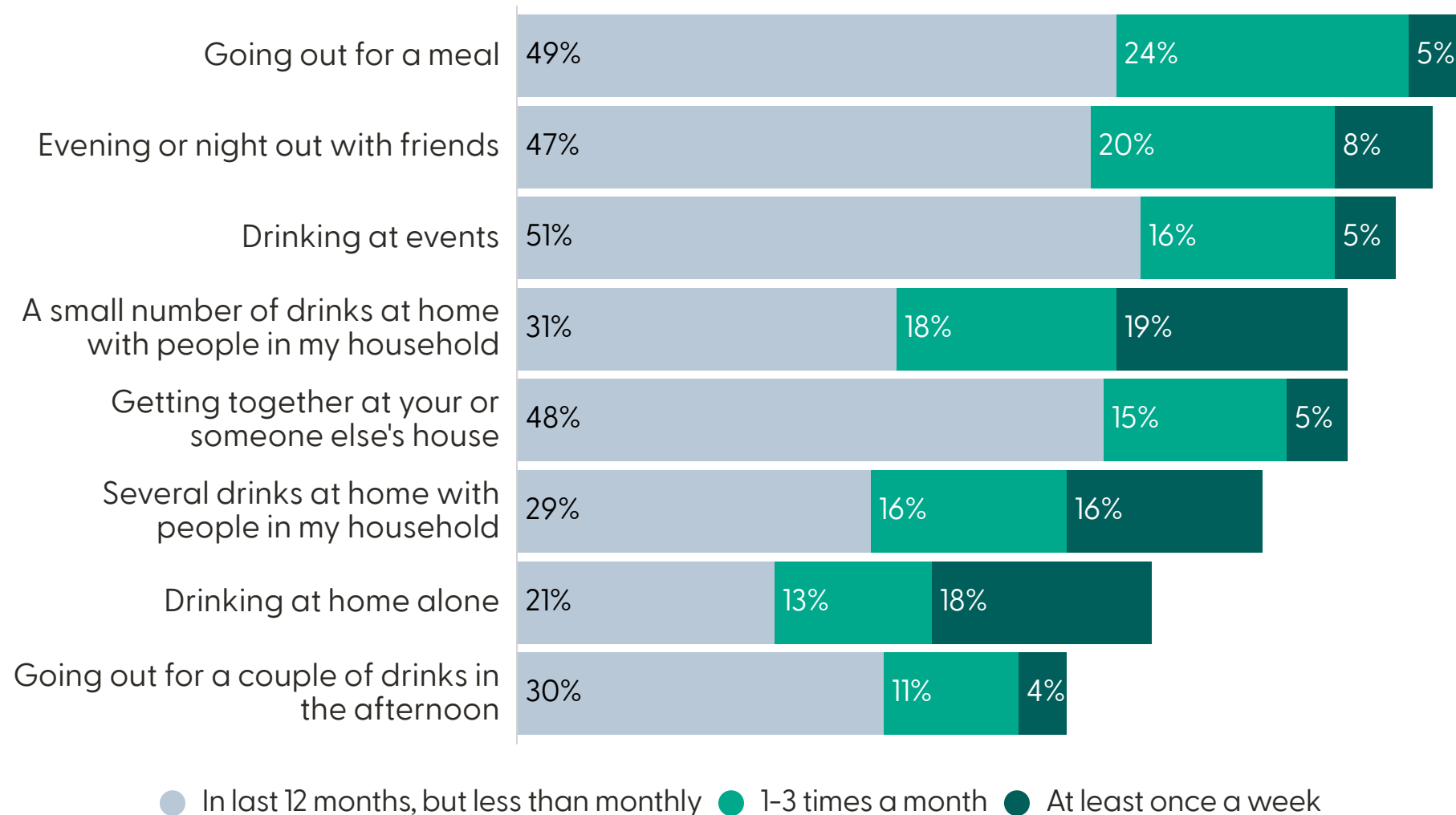
## Half of high risk drinkers often worry about their alcohol consumption

49% of high risk drinkers have often worried about their alcohol consumption over the last 12 months  
(Selecting 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 of worry)

# Almost one in five drinkers drink at home alone at least once a week

## If someone drinks at home alone, they are likely to do this regularly

Chart displays % who have had alcohol on different occasions at some point in last 12 months: less often than monthly, monthly and weekly



**Overall, drinkers are less likely to drink at home alone compared to other occasions**

But if they do drink at home alone, they are likely to do this more regularly

**A third of UK drinkers living with someone drink at home at least once a week**

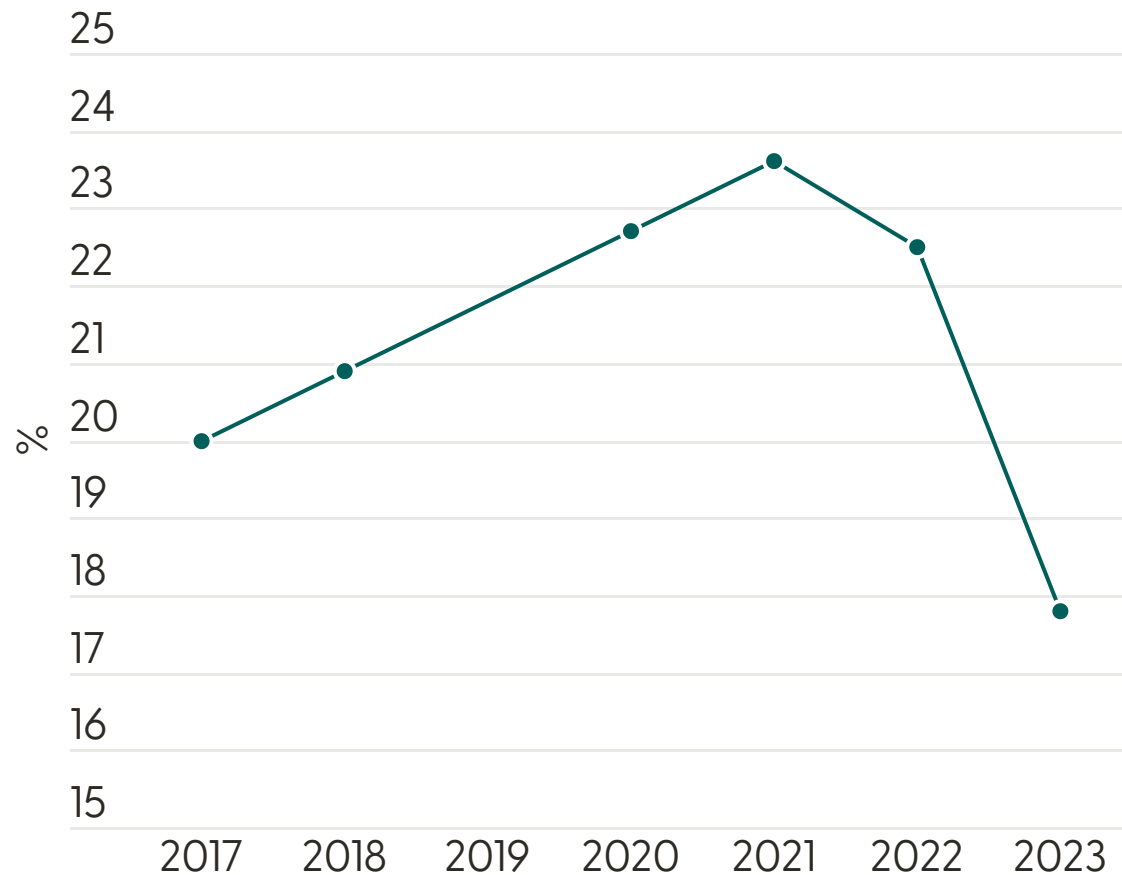
34% either drink at home alone or with other people in their household

Drinking occasions. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=9,035)

# There has been a significant drop in people drinking at home alone

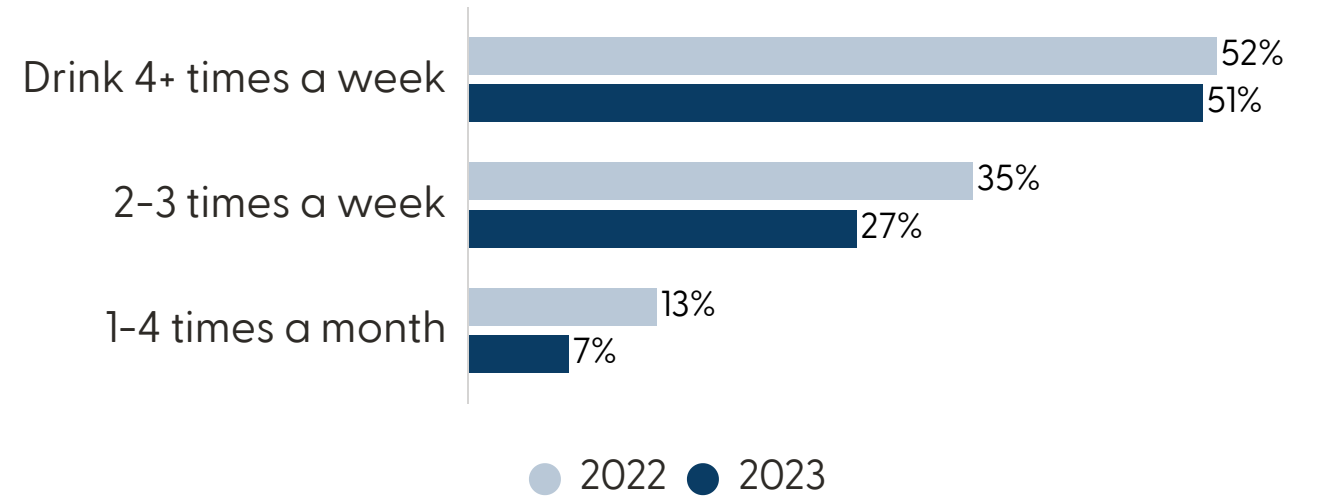
Those drinking at home alone at least once a week is down from 24% in 2021 to 18% in 2023

The biggest drop is amongst 18-34 year olds: 18% were drinking at home alone every week in 2022, down to 11% in 2023



Those who drink less than 4 times a week are likely to have changed home alone drinking habits

% who drink home alone at least once a week



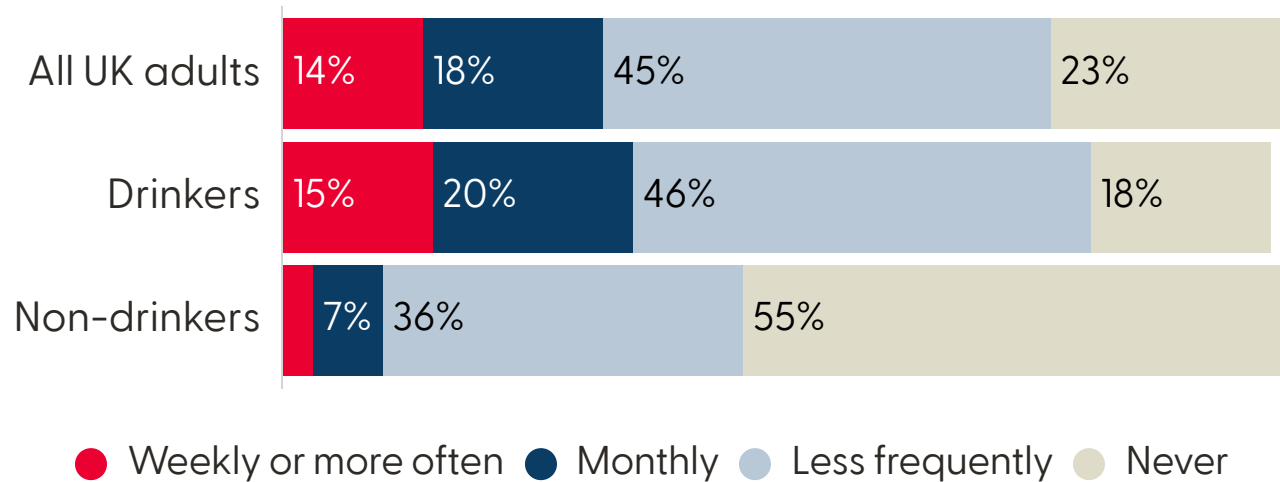
The more often someone drinks at home alone, the less likely they are to feel that is a cause of worry

30% of those who drink at home alone once a week or more agree that it is a cause of worry, compared to 37% who drink at home alone 1-3 times a month, 48% every 2-3 months and 72% who never drink at home alone.

Drinking occasions. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol: 2023 (n=9,035); 2022 (n=5,428); 2021 (n=7,911); 2020 (n=7,834), 2019 (n=2,145), 2018 (n=7,902), 2017 (n=5,427)

# More than a third of drinkers go to the pub at least once a month

And nearly half of non-drinkers have visited the pub in the last year



Those visiting the pub weekly or more often are more likely to be...

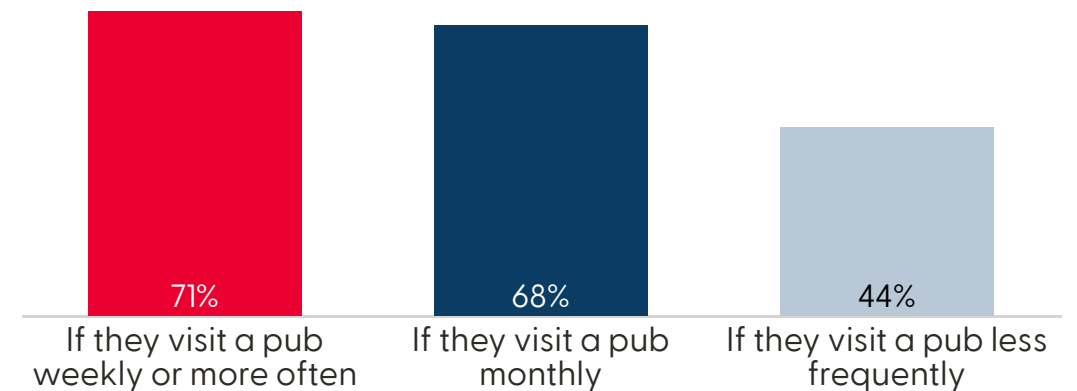
- Male** (19% vs 8% of females)
- 18 to 24 years old** (17% vs 11% of 45 to 54 year olds)
- Live with friends/housemates** (26% vs 15% who live alone)

Pub visit frequency. Base: all UK adults (n=10,473); UK adults who drink alcohol (n=9,035)



The more often someone visits the pub, the more likely it is to socialise

% selecting 'to socialise' as a reason for visiting a pub



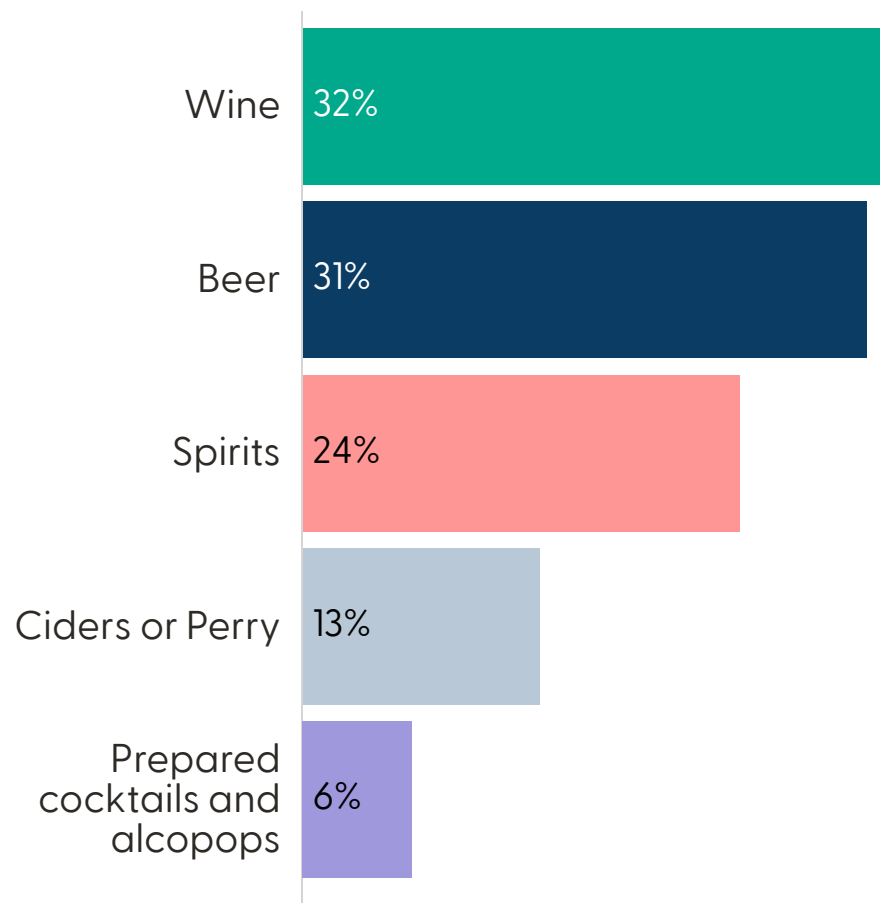
There are some differences across urban and rural areas

- Supporting the local pub/community is more likely to motivate people in rural areas to visit the pub, than those in urban areas (22% vs 14%)
- Those in urban areas more likely to go to socialise (56%), for the convenient location (31%) and 'to get out of the house' (22%)

# Wine and beer are the most popular drinks amongst UK drinkers

More than three in ten UK drinkers always or often drink wine and beer when drinking

% always/often drink the following when drinking



Those in the least deprived areas of the UK are more likely to drink wine most often

38% compared to 25% of drinkers in the most deprived areas



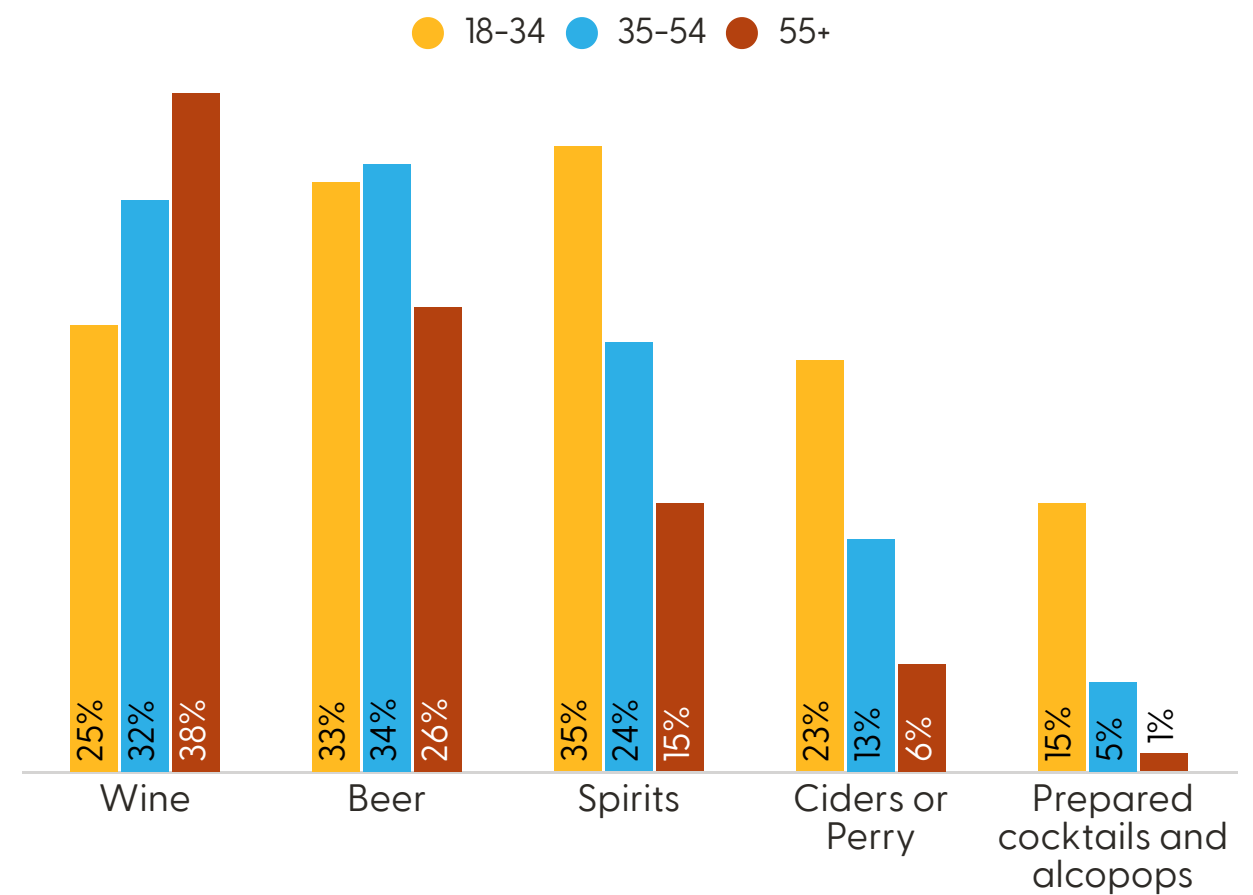
Male drinkers are more likely to drink beer most often

50% compared to 13% of female drinkers



Some of the biggest differences in drink preferences are by age group

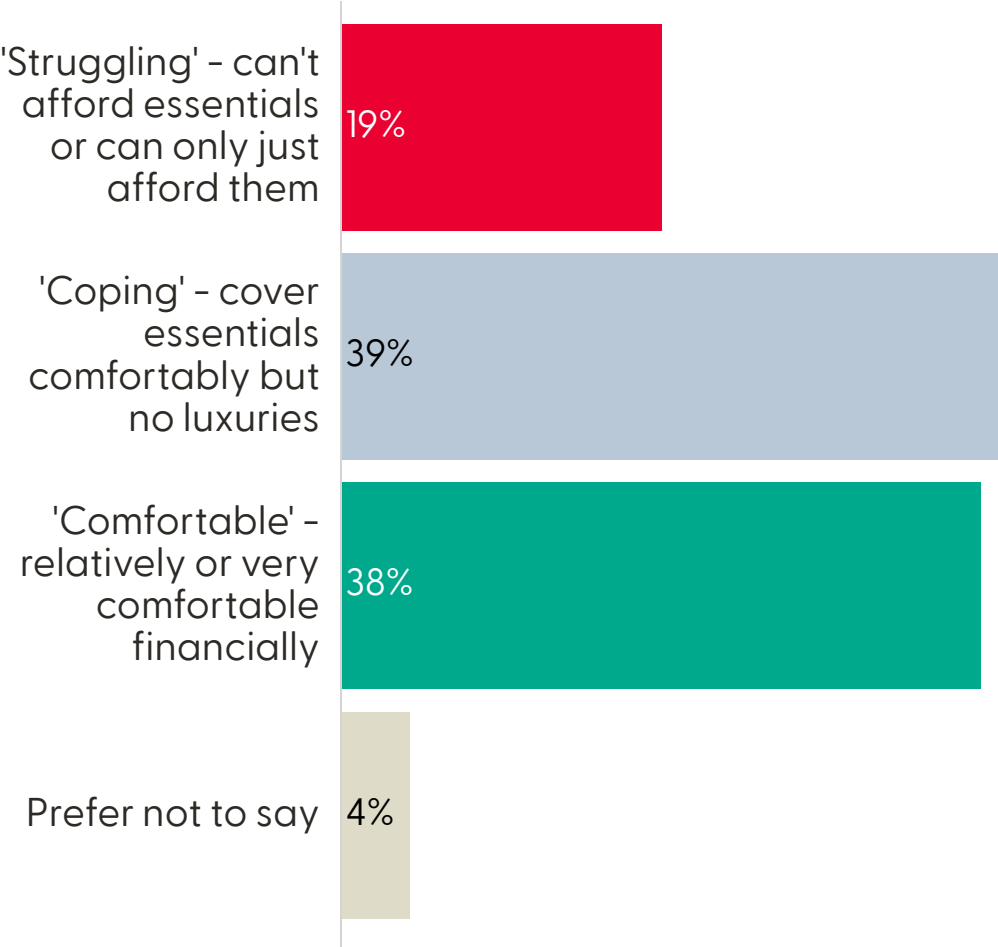
% always/often drink the following when drinking



Types of drinks and frequency. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol, n=9,035)

# Those struggling with the cost of living crisis seem to be going one way or the other with their drinking

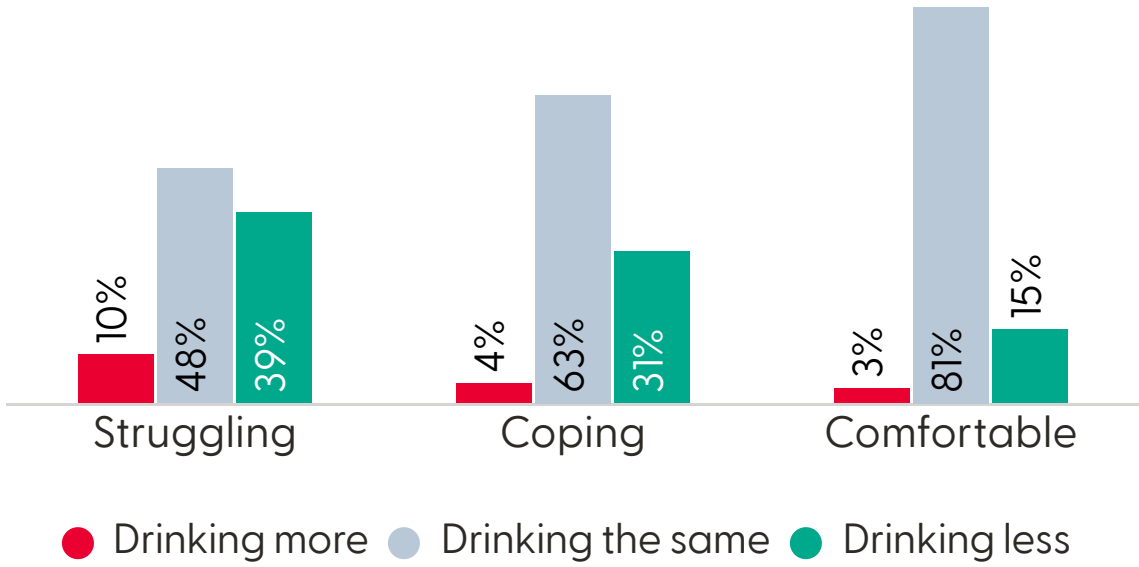
Overall, one in five UK adults report struggling with their financial position



Financial position. Base: all UK adults (n=10,473)



One in ten drinkers struggling with their finances report drinking more due to the cost of living crisis



## How do alcohol purchasing decisions differ?

Those in a comfortable financial position are more likely to drink wine and consider taste/flavour important (81% vs 66% of those struggling financially). Those struggling are more likely than others to consider high alcohol strength as important (12% vs 7% comfortable financially).

# What people think about their drinking

Responsible drinking, moderation and health

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**Take me to...**

[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2023](#) | [What people think about their drinking](#) | [Concern and conversations](#) | [Why people drink](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [About Drinkaware](#); [About PS Research](#) | [Appendix](#)



# What people think about their drinking: **what to look out for**



The majority of UK drinkers feel that they 'drink responsibly' - of those who drink most frequently, they are more likely to feel they are being responsible if they rarely or never binge drink



Two in five UK drinkers have tried to reduce the amount they drink over the last 12 months, with the majority of these successfully reducing their alcohol consumption



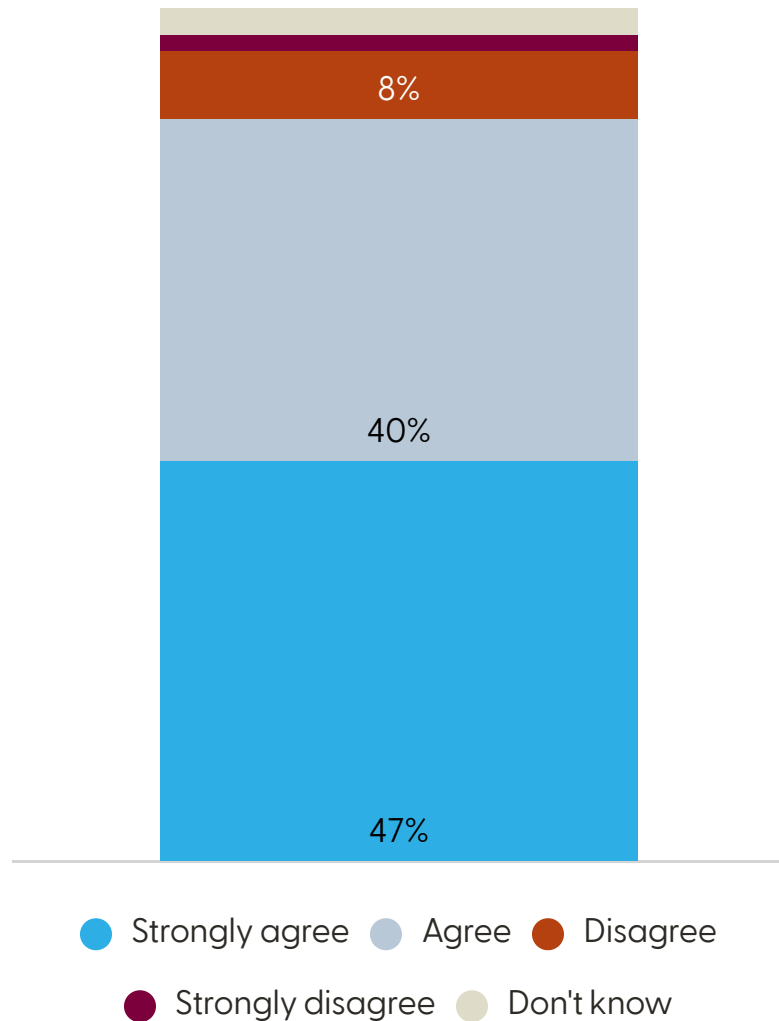
Over half of UK drinkers feel their nation has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol, but only one in ten feel themselves and their friends/family have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol



Three in five UK drinkers never worry about their drinking and four in five do not feel it is likely that they will have increased health problems in the future as a result of their drinking

# The majority of UK drinkers feel that they 'drink responsibly'

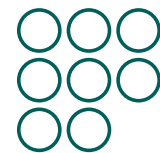
87% of UK adults strongly agree or agree that they 'drink responsibly'



**Seven in ten (71%) people who drink 4+ times a week feel they 'drink responsibly'**

Compared to 85% who drink 2 to 3 times a week, 92% who drink once a week and 93% who drink less than weekly

**The majority of people who drink 4+ times a week feel they 'drink responsibly' as long as they...**



**Drink less than 5 units on a typical drinking day**

86% of those who drink 4+ times a week but have less than five units in a typical drinking day agree that they 'drink responsibly', compared to 51% if they drink 5+ units in a typical drinking day



**Do not binge drink**

97% of those who drink 4+ times a week but never binge drink agree that they 'drink responsibly', compared to 56% who binge drink at least monthly



**If someone is a high risk drinker, they are much less likely to agree that they 'drink responsibly'**

Two in five (40%) of high risk or possibly dependent drinkers agree that they 'drink responsibly', compared to 95% of low risk drinkers and 76% of increasing risk drinkers

# What does 'responsible drinking' mean to UK drinkers?

The Monitor included the following question: "To the best of your knowledge, when you hear, or see, the term 'responsible drinking', what does that mean to you?". Respondents were given a text box in which to answer and were encouraged to answer in as much detail as possible. Key themes are displayed proportionately in the below diagram:



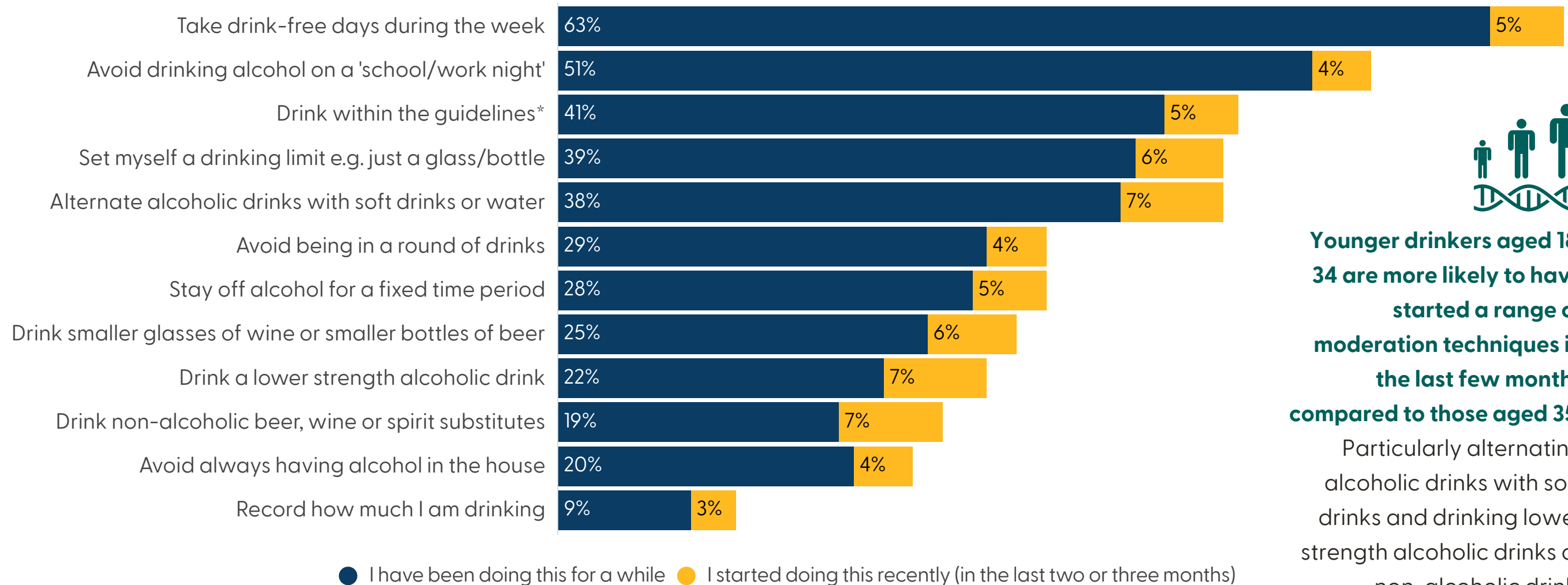
## How has this been analysed?

Approximately 10% of the 6521 responses were initially analysed to identify common themes and the common words used to describe each theme. All responses were then analysed by searching for the identified words using the Text Filter function within Excel. All themes with 5% or more responses are proportionately shown in this diagram. A full list of the themes, the words used in the Text Filter search and the %s can be found in the [Appendix](#). 10% of all responses did not include at least one of the words identified as a search term.

# So how do UK drinkers try to moderate their alcohol consumption?

## Drinkers are most likely to take drink-free days during the week to moderate their drinking

% of drinkers who have been doing the following moderation techniques for a while or started recently



**Younger drinkers aged 18-34 are more likely to have started a range of moderation techniques in the last few months compared to those aged 35+**

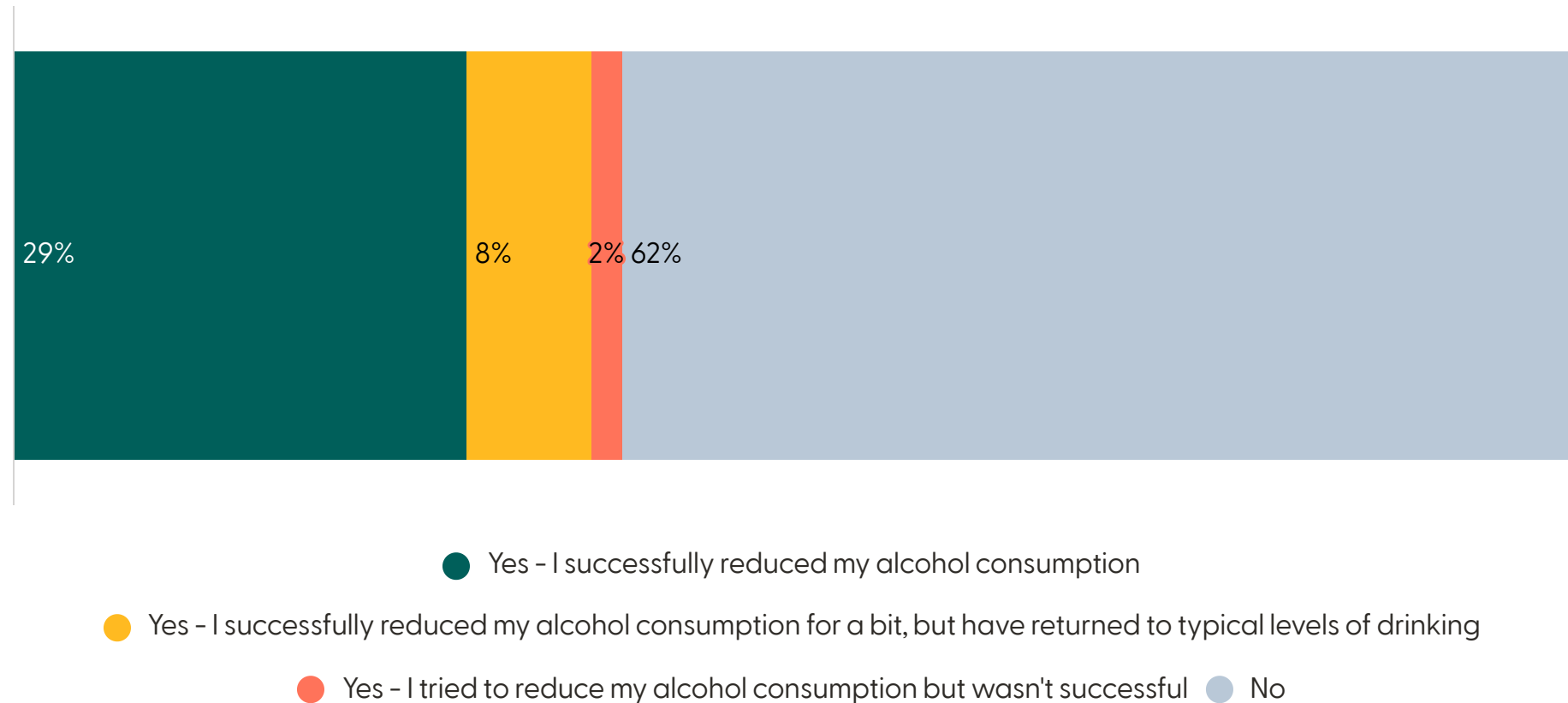
Particularly alternating alcoholic drinks with soft drinks and drinking lower strength alcoholic drinks or non-alcoholic drinks

Moderation. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n = 9,035)

\*This is the respondents perception of what the guidelines are; the question did not state what the actual guidelines are

# Two in five UK drinkers have tried to reduce the amount they drink

38% of UK drinkers indicated that they have tried to reduce their alcohol consumption in the last 12 months, with the majority successfully reducing the amount they drink



UK drinkers are more likely to have at least tried to reduce their alcohol consumption if they are...



**Male**  
40% vs 36% of females



**18 to 34 years old**  
41% vs 34% of 55+



**AB social grades**  
41% vs 36% of DE



**Ethnic minority**  
53% vs 36% White



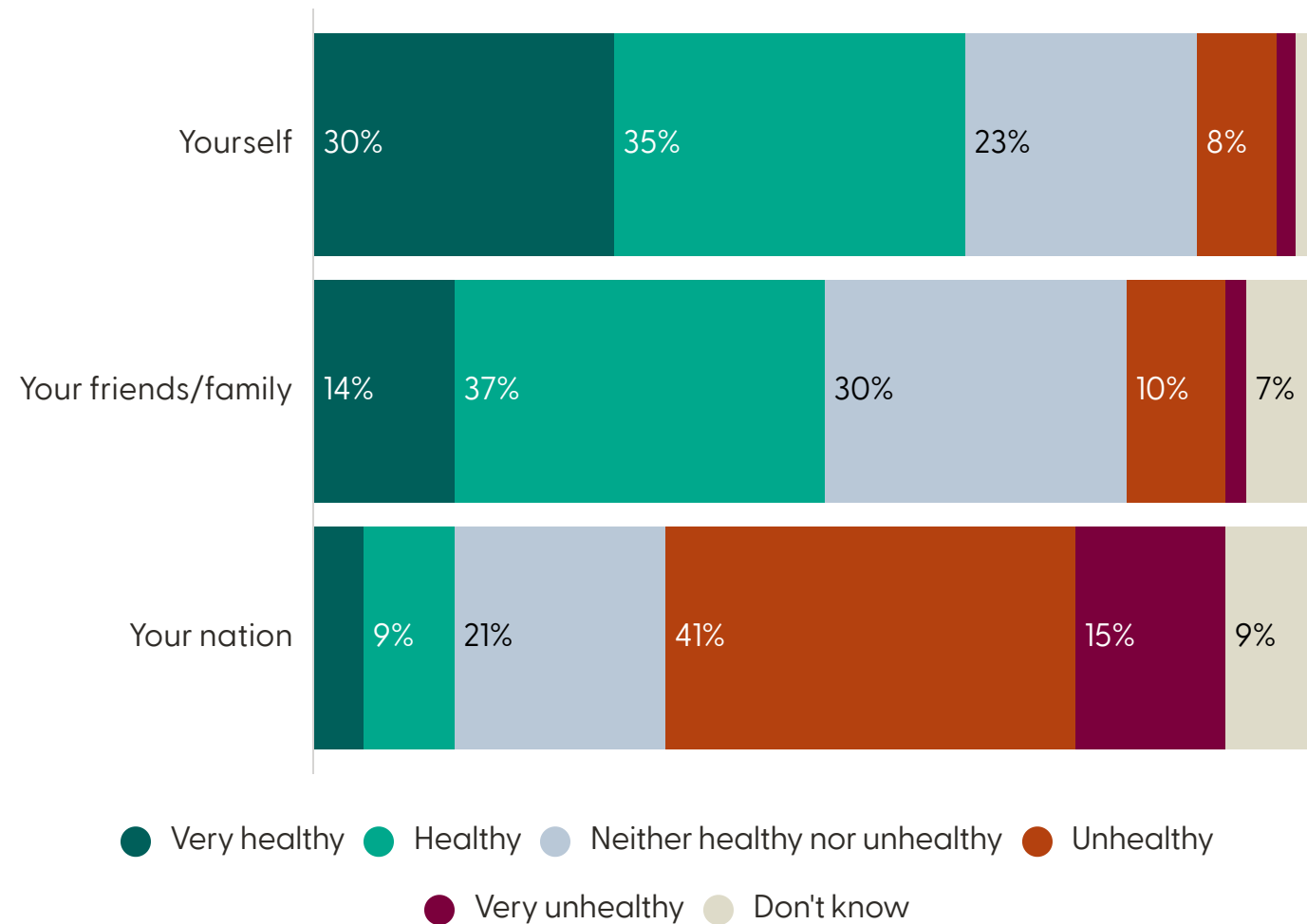
**Parents of u18s**  
42% vs 36% not a parent of u18s



Attempted to reduce alcohol consumption. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n = 9,035)

# 1 in 10 drinkers feel they have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol

UK drinkers feel the majority of their nation has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol, but they are much less likely to feel this is the case about themselves or their friends and family



**Who are more likely to feel that their nation has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol?**

**Female** - 59% vs 53% male

**18-34 years old** - 59% vs 51% of those aged 55+

**AB social grades** - 59% vs 52% of DE social grades

**Live in Scotland** - 66% vs 38% of drinkers in Wales

**Drink once a month or less** - 60% vs 52% 4+ times a week

**Any health conditions** - 59% vs 54% no health conditions

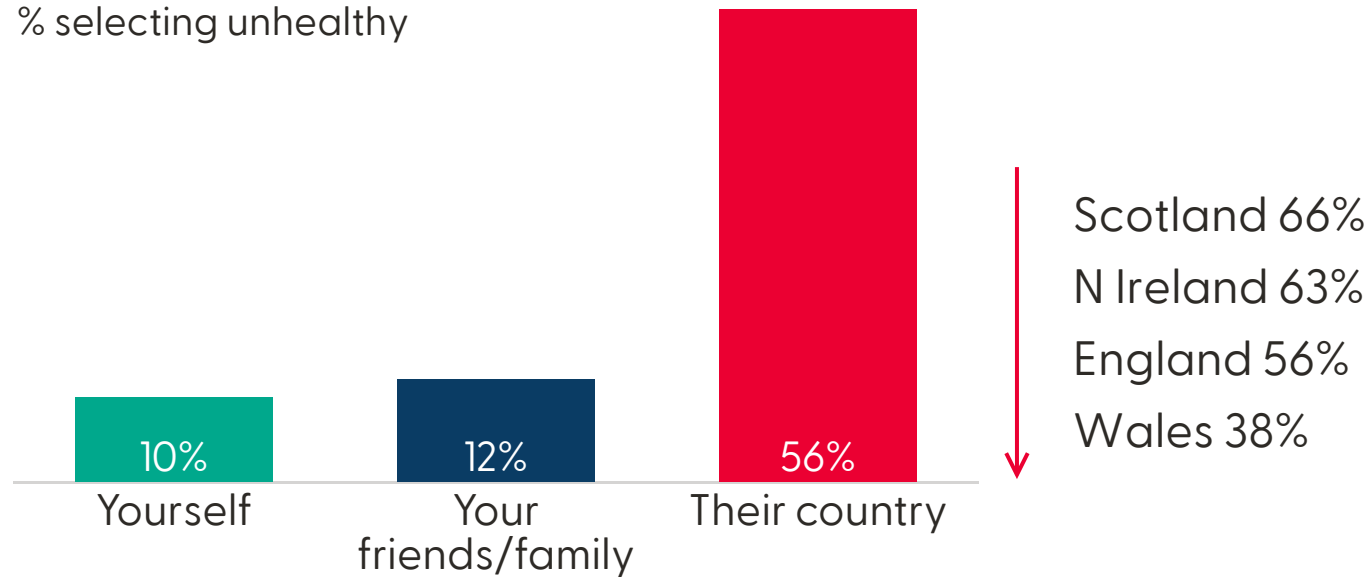


Relationship with alcohol. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n = 9,035)

# Attitudes and perceptions around drinking are revealing

**We are much more likely to feel the UK has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol than ourselves or our friends/family**

% selecting unhealthy



**Males (12%) and 35-54 year olds (13%) are more likely to feel their own relationship with alcohol is unhealthy**

- Younger people are more likely to feel the country's relationship with alcohol is unhealthy (59% of 18-34 year olds compared to 51% of those aged 55+)
- The less often someone drinks, the more unhealthy they feel the country's relationship with drinking is



Relationship with alcohol. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n = 9,035)

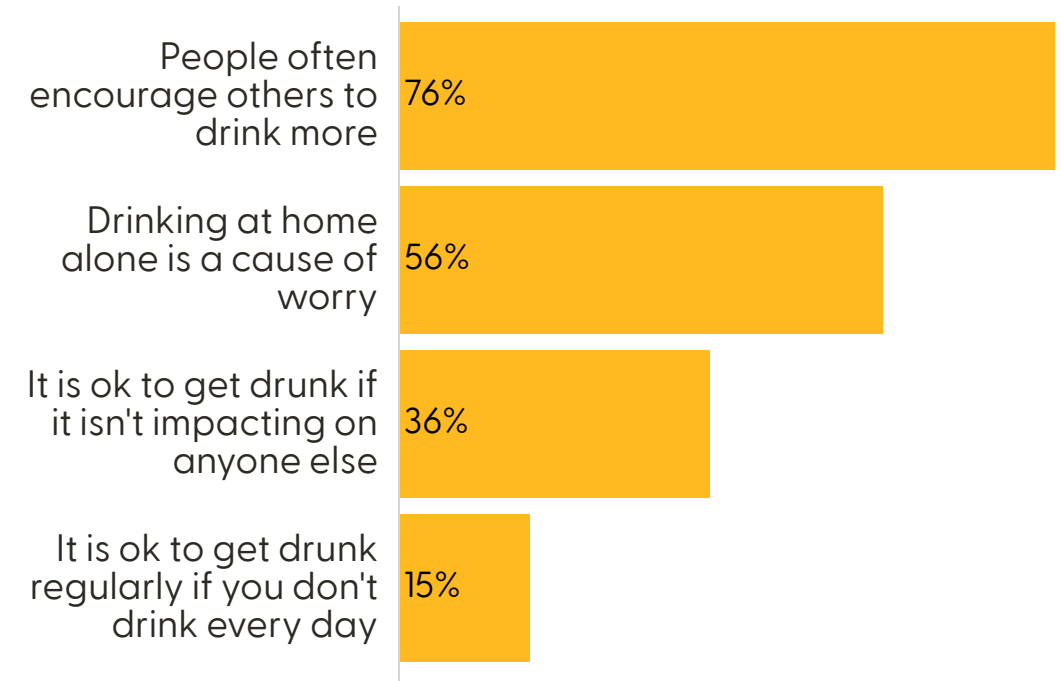


Up in Scotland, alcohol is a very big deal. If you don't drink, it's almost like people mourn for you, it's like there has been a death in the family.

(Individual interview participant)

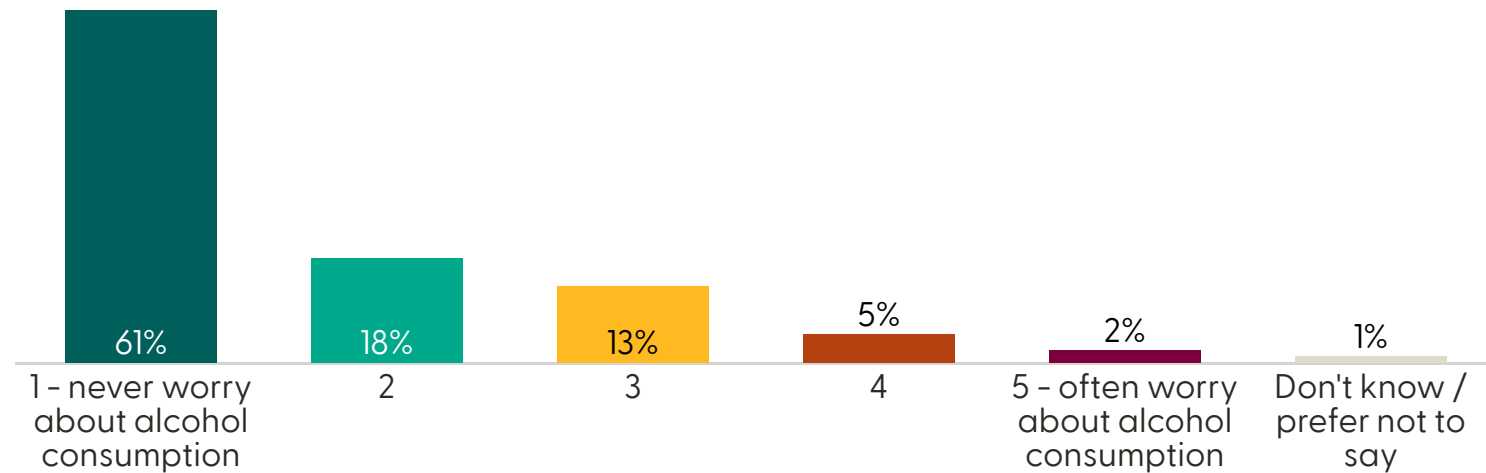
**Three in four feel people often encourage others to drink more**

% selecting agree or strongly agree



# Three in five UK drinkers never worry about their drinking

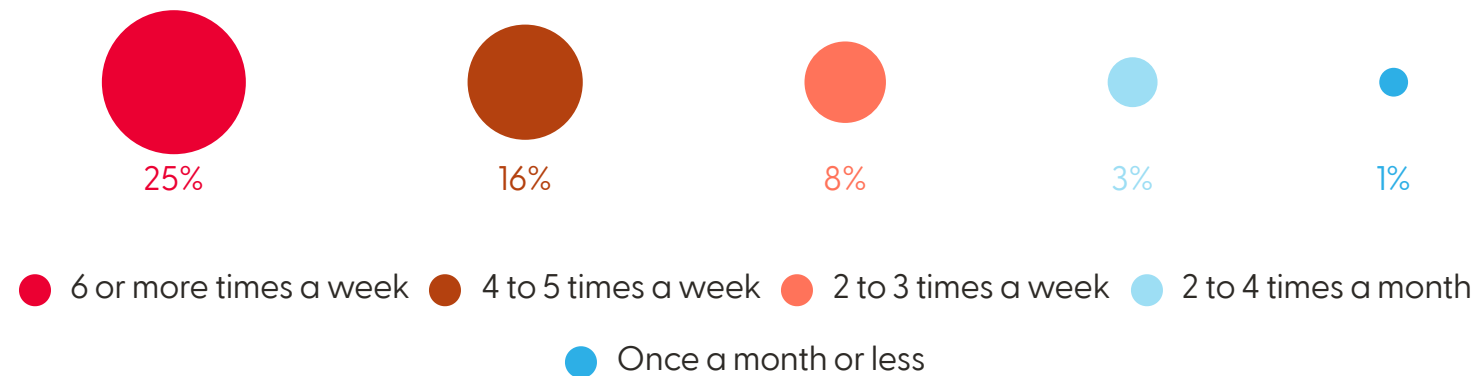
7% of UK drinkers often worry (4 or 5 rating) about their alcohol consumption



**Drinkers who say alcohol is important to their social life are more likely to worry about their drinking**

**The more frequently someone drinks, the more worried they are about their drinking**

% rating their worry as 4 or 5



15% of drinkers who consider alcohol to be important to their social life indicate that they often worry about their drinking (4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5), compared to 4% of drinkers who say alcohol is unimportant to their social life



# Who is more likely to worry about their drinking?

**% who often worry about their drinking**  
(Rated 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5)



## 35 to 54 years old

9% vs 5% of those aged 55+



## Ethnic minority group

12% vs 6% of White drinkers



## Severe mental health rating

16% vs 4% with a normal PHQ score



## Caring responsibilities

10% vs 6% with no responsibilities



## Live with friends/housemates

15% vs 6% living with spouse/partner



**But drinkers with caring responsibilities drink less than others**



## They drink less frequently

44% drink weekly or more often, compared to 49% of drinkers with no caring responsibilities



## They drink less on a typical drinking day

74% drink up to 4 units in a typical drinking day, compared to 68% of drinkers with no caring responsibilities



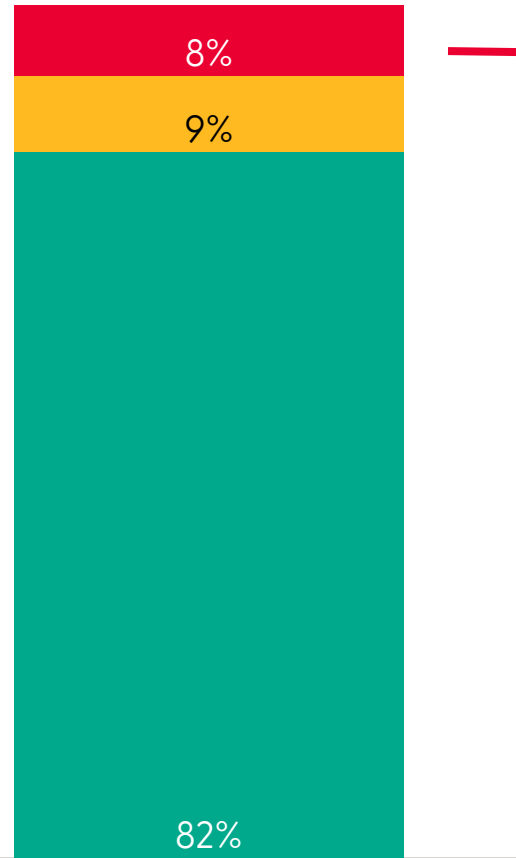
## They binge drink less often

24% binge drink at least once a month, compared to 28% of drinkers with no caring responsibilities

# Who is more likely to struggle to stop drinking once they start?

More than four in five (82%) UK drinkers have never found themselves unable to stop drinking once they have started

How often drinkers were unable to stop drinking after they started over the last year



- Never
- Less than monthly
- Monthly or more often

## Who are more likely to not be able to stop drinking once they start?

Percentages refer to proportion of UK drinkers who selected monthly or more often



### Males

10% compared to 6% of female drinkers



### Ethnic minority group

13% compared to 8% of White drinkers



### Live with friends or housemates

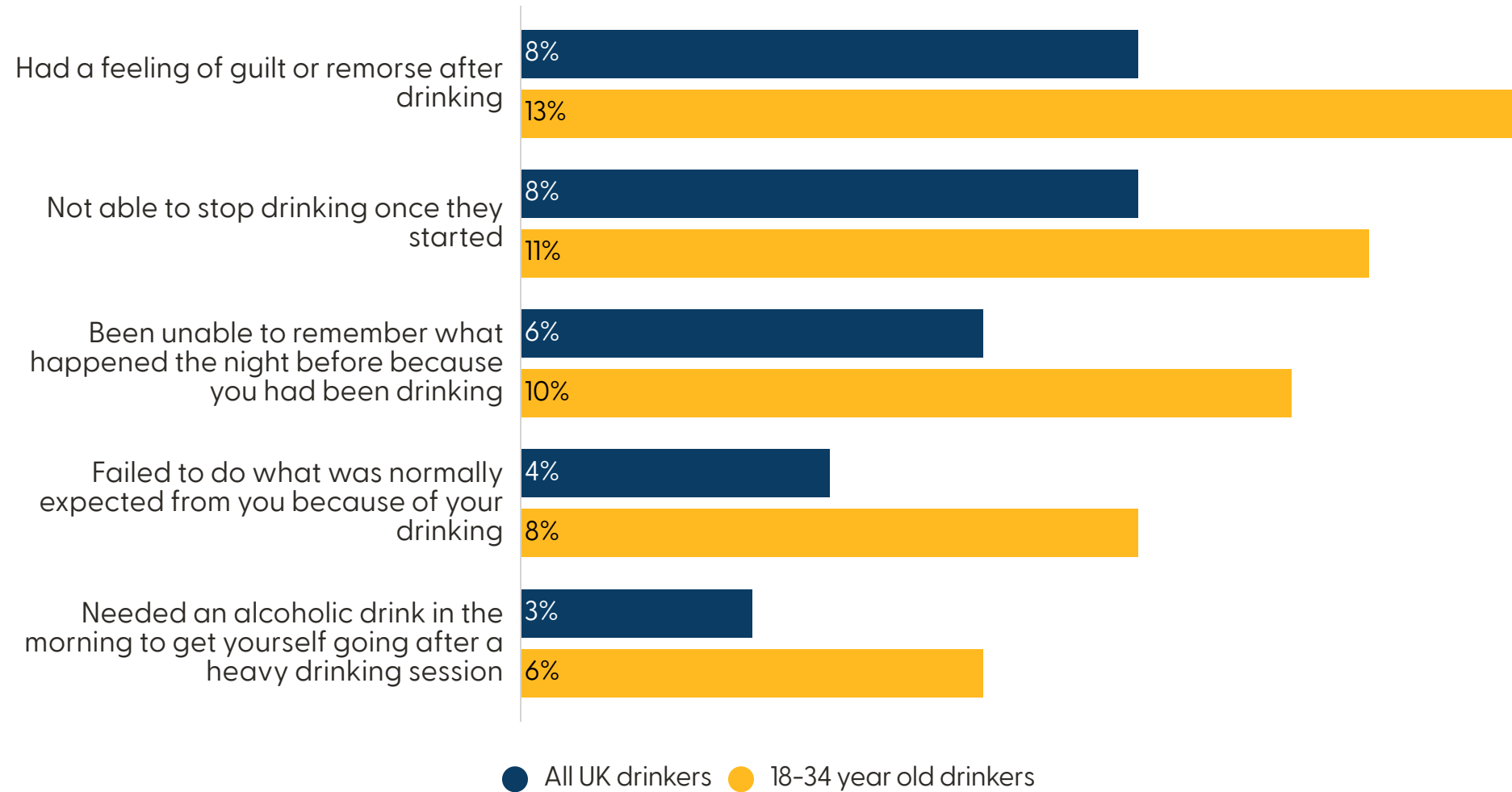
18% compared to 7% who live with a spouse or partner

How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started? Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n = 9,035)

# Younger drinkers are more likely to report risky behaviour when drinking

**13% of 18 to 34 year old drinkers have had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking at least once a month over the last year**

Questions from full AUDIT assessment (% monthly or more often over the last 12 months unless stated otherwise)



**Close to one in five (18%) of 18-34 year old drinkers report that somebody else has been injured as a result of their drinking**

Compared to 12% of all drinkers

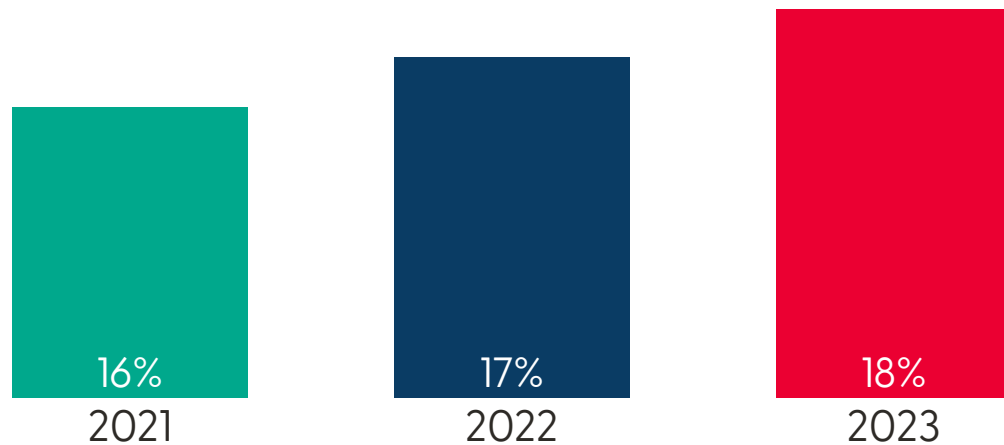


AUDIT assessment questions T1-T7. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n = 9,035); 18-34 drinkers (n=2,236)

# Nearly one in five drinkers feel it will lead to future health problems

The proportion of UK drinkers who feel it is likely they will have increased health problems in the future if they continue to drink at their current level has increased over the last two years

% who feel it is very/fairly likely they will have future health problems



**If alcohol is important to someone's social life, they are more likely to feel that they will have future health problems in the future due to drinking**

41% of those who consider alcohol to be important to their social life feel that it is very or fairly likely



Future health. Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n = 9,035)



**Who is more likely to feel that their current level of drinking will lead to future health problems?**



**Males**

23% compared to 14% of female drinkers



**35 to 54 year olds**

21% compared to 15% of those aged 55+



**AB social grade**

21% compared to 16% of those in DE social grades



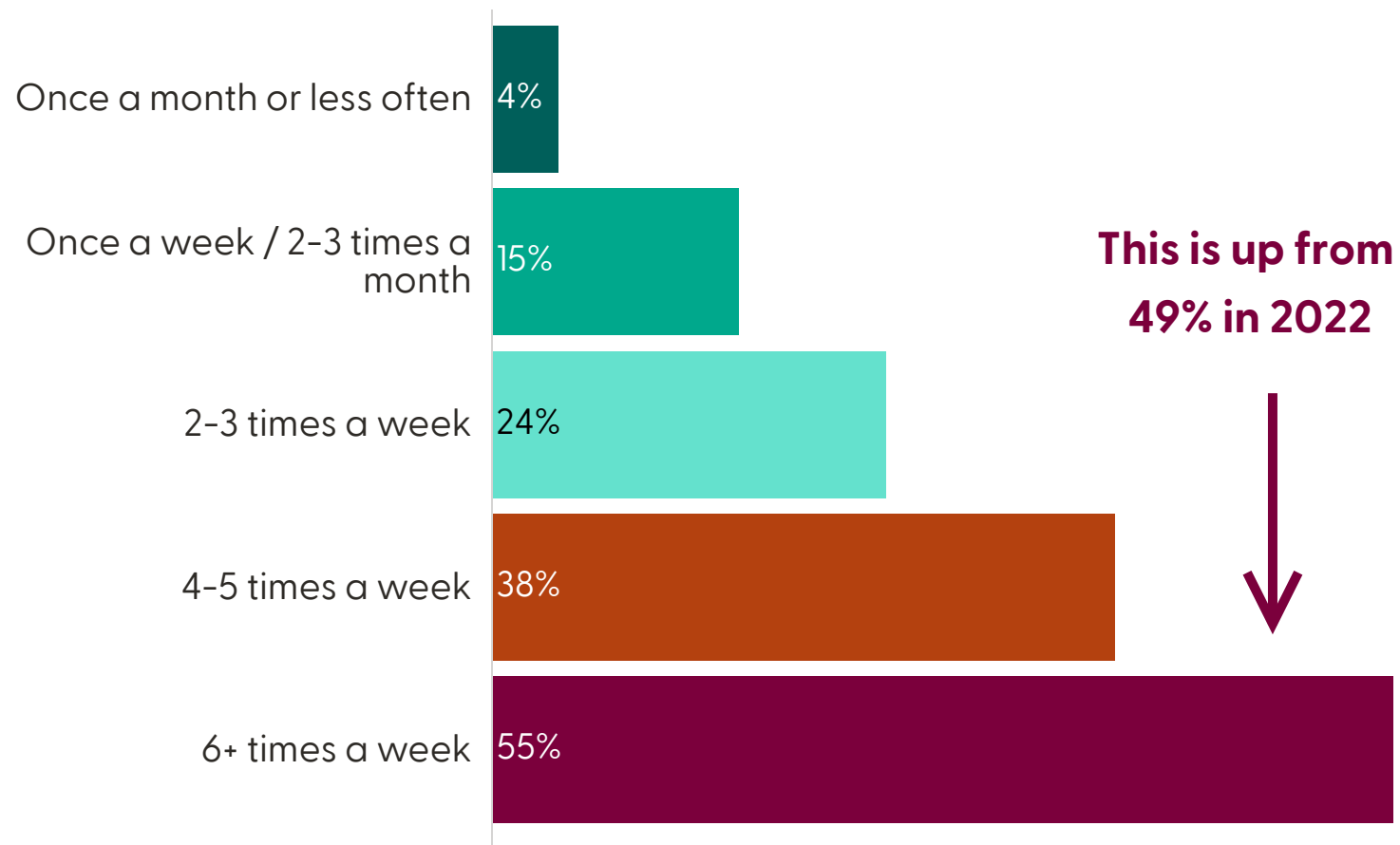
**In an ethnic minority group**

27% compared to 18% of white drinkers

# Half of those drinking most often feel it will impact on their health

The more often people drink during a week, the more likely they are to feel they will have increased health problems in the future

% who feel it is very/fairly likely they will have future health problems by drinking frequency



Future health problems very/fairly likely by drinking frequency. Base: drink once a month or less often (n = 2,687); once a week/2-3 times a month (n=2,590); 2-3 times a week (n=2,128); 4-5 times a week (n=886); 6+ times a week (n=744)



Three quarters of UK adults feel that regular drinking will affect someone's health even if they are not getting drunk

76% of UK adults **disagree** with the statement: 'If someone is not getting drunk, regular drinking will not affect their health'

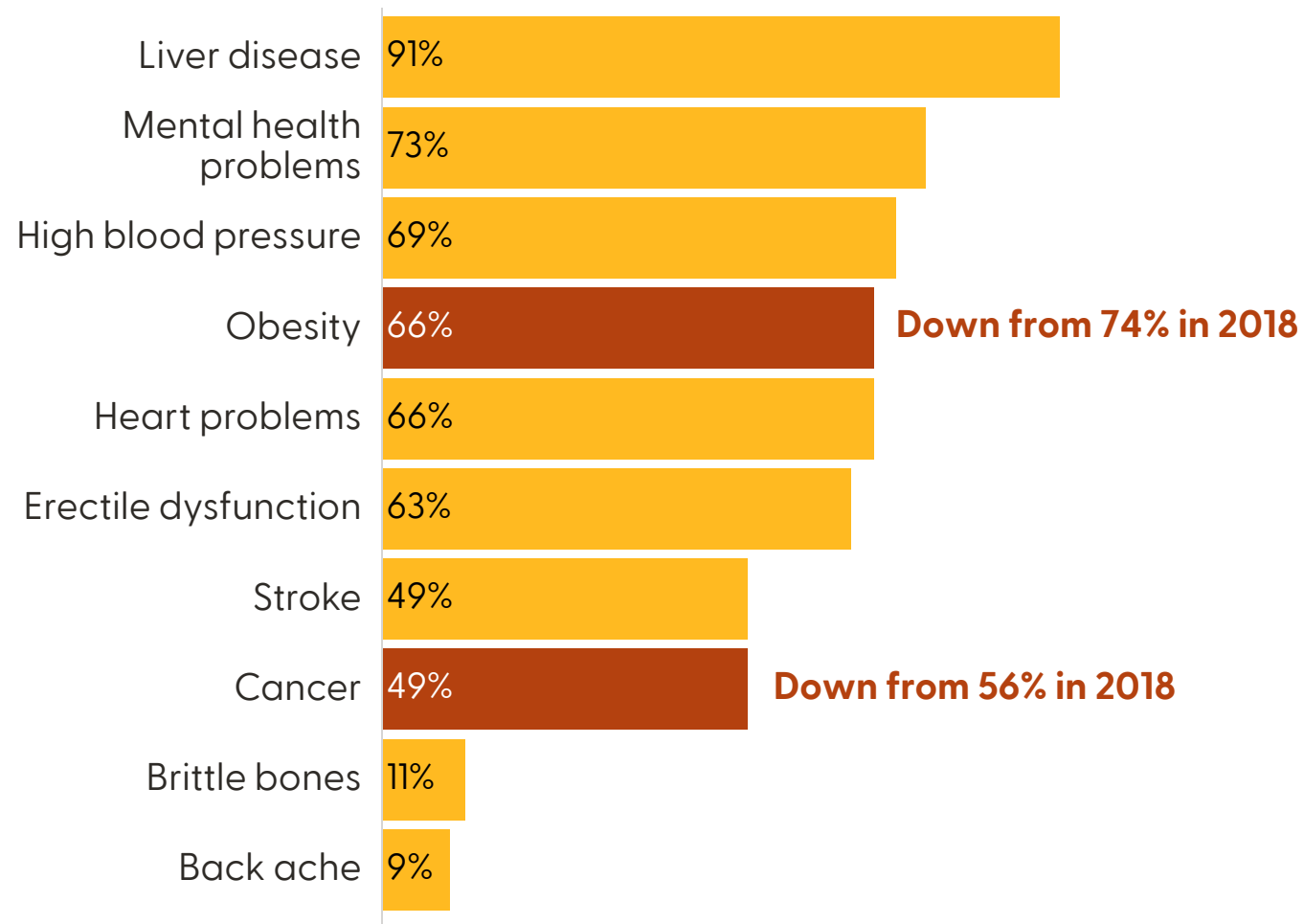
Who is more likely to think this is ok?


- 16% of **young people aged 18-34** agree with the statement, compared to 9% of those aged 55+
- 18% of **people in ethnic minority groups** agree with the statement, compared to 11% of white people

# The majority of people know the link between alcohol and liver disease

Two thirds think there is a link between alcohol and obesity, whilst half identified a link with cancer

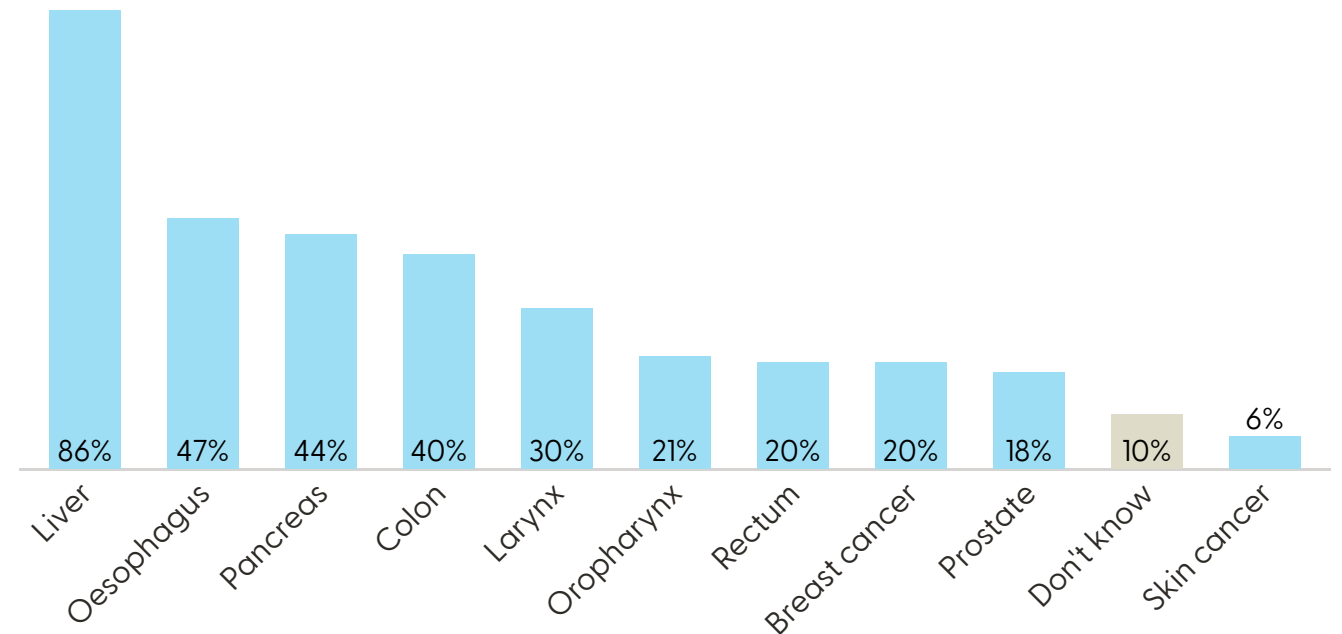
% selecting health conditions they think are linked to alcohol consumption



 Prompted health conditions linked to alcohol. Base: all UK adults (n = 10,473)  
 'Don't know' and 'none of these' options not displayed

Of those identifying a link between alcohol and cancer, the majority specified liver cancer

% identified link with cancer selecting specific cancer types



 Alcohol linked to types of cancer (prompted). Base: all UK adults who indicated a link to cancer (n = 5,187)



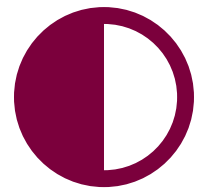
When told about the link between alcohol and cancer, half (49%) of UK drinkers indicated that it has little or no impact\* on their perceptions of drinking

This drops to 34% of UK adults who drink 4+ times a week

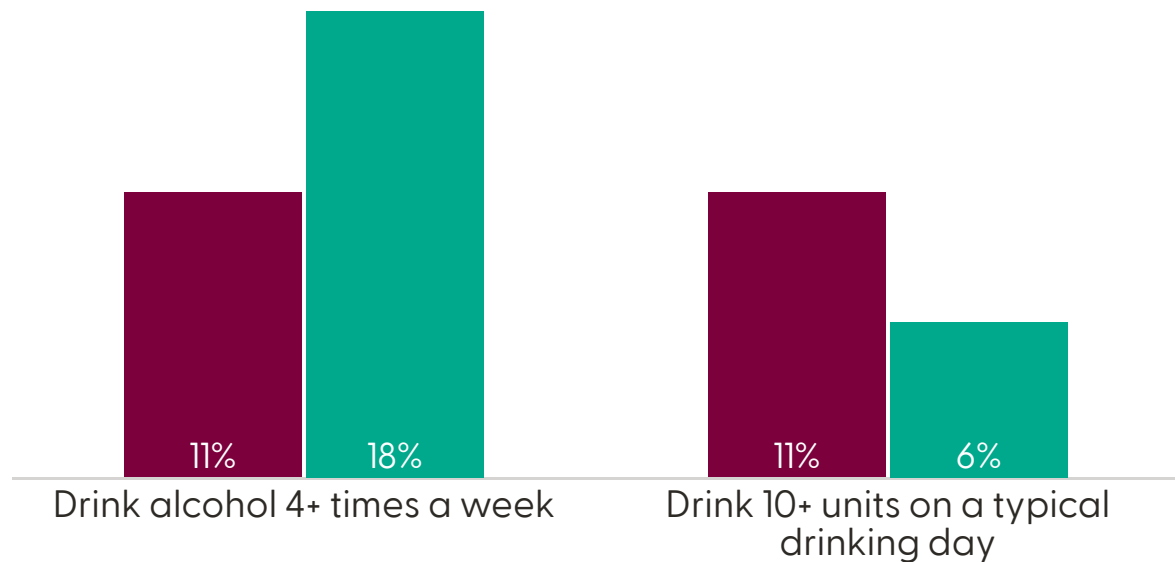
\* Rated 1 or 2 on a scale where 1 is 'no impact on me' and 5 is 'makes me want to change my drinking habits'

# Impact of mental health on drinking habits

Comparing those with a severe mental health score with those with a normal score on the PHQ<sup>6</sup>



Drinkers with a severe mental health score drink less frequently, but when they drink they tend to drink more



● Severe mental health score ● Normal mental health score

Drinking habits by mental health score (PHQ). Base: drinkers with a severe score (n = 811); drinkers with a normal score (n=5,204)



Drinkers with a severe mental health score are more likely to worry about their drinking



More likely to have often worried about their alcohol consumption over the last 12 months

16% often worry (4 or 5 on worry scale) compared to 4% of those with a normal mental health score



Less likely to feel they drink responsibly

17% disagree or strongly disagree that they 'drink responsibly' compared to 7% with a normal mental health score



More likely to feel their drinking will lead to future health problems

28% feel it is very/fairly likely compared to 14% with a normal mental health score

# Concern and conversations

**Concern for theirs and others' drinking, actions taken and comfort having conversations**

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**Take me to...**

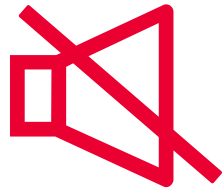
[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2023](#) | [What people think about their drinking](#) | [Concern and conversations](#) | [Why people drink](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [About Drinkaware](#); [About PS Research](#) | [Appendix](#)



## Concern and conversations: **what to look out for**



One in four UK adults are concerned about someone else's drinking, but this is lower than it was in 2022; concern is most likely to be for friends and relate to the amount of alcohol they are drinking



One in five people who are concerned about someone else's drinking have not said anything or taken any action and qualitative research suggests several reasons why people may be reticent to have these conversations, including fear of damaging relationships, not knowing how to broach the subject and expectations that the person will become defensive or augmentative



When a conversation was started about their drinking, it was more likely to lead to action than when someone just made a comment about it, although the qualitative research revealed that comments may be a pre-cursor to more in-depth conversations and that the impact of a conversation often depends on the willingness of the person to accept that they may be drinking in a harmful or problematic way



The qualitative research found that the focus of these conversations is often on how often or much someone is drinking and/or the impact of their drinking, but less often on the reasons why people drink in this way

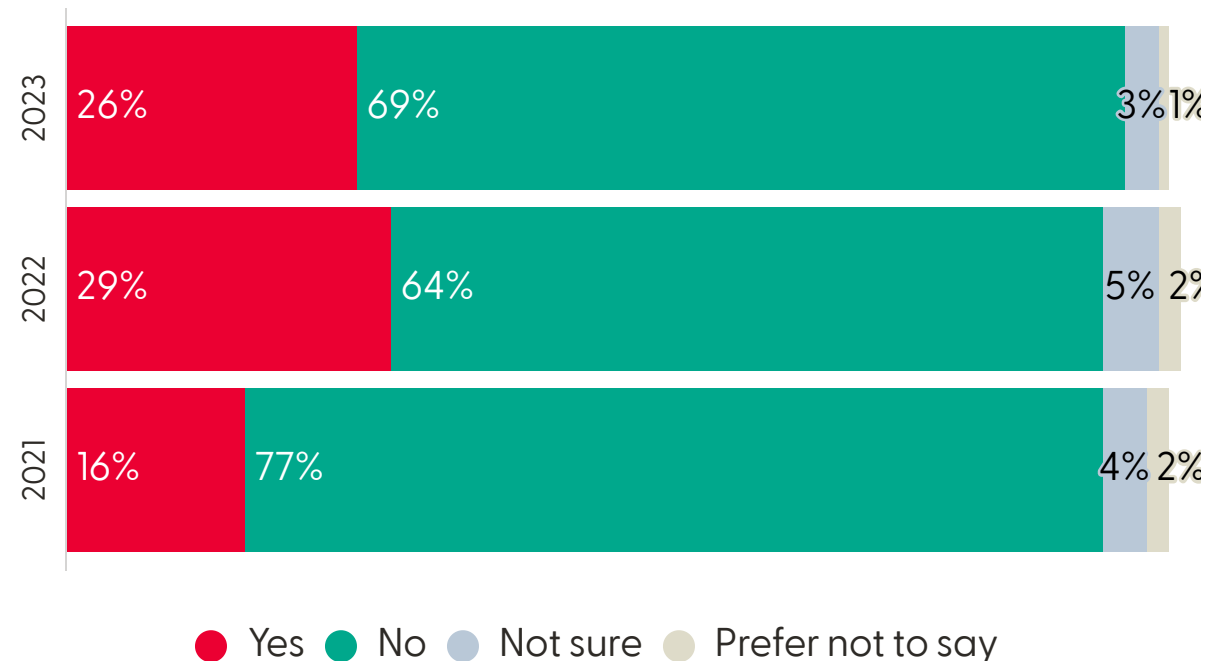
# One in four UK adults are concerned about someone else's drinking

'Someone else' could be family members, friends, work colleagues or other people you know

After a rise in 2022, concern about someone else's drinking has fallen. In 2023, 26% expressed a concern about someone else's drinking in the last 12 months.



People are more likely to have a concern about someone else's drinking if they are...



## 18 to 34 year olds

30% of 18 to 34 year olds are concerned about someone else's drinking, compared to 26% of 35 to 54 year olds and 24% of those aged 55+



## Female

30% of females are concerned about someone else's drinking, compared to 22% of males



## Living with friends or housemates

34% of UK adults who live with friends/housemates are concerned about someone else's drinking, compared to 25% of those who live alone and 26% who live with a spouse or partner

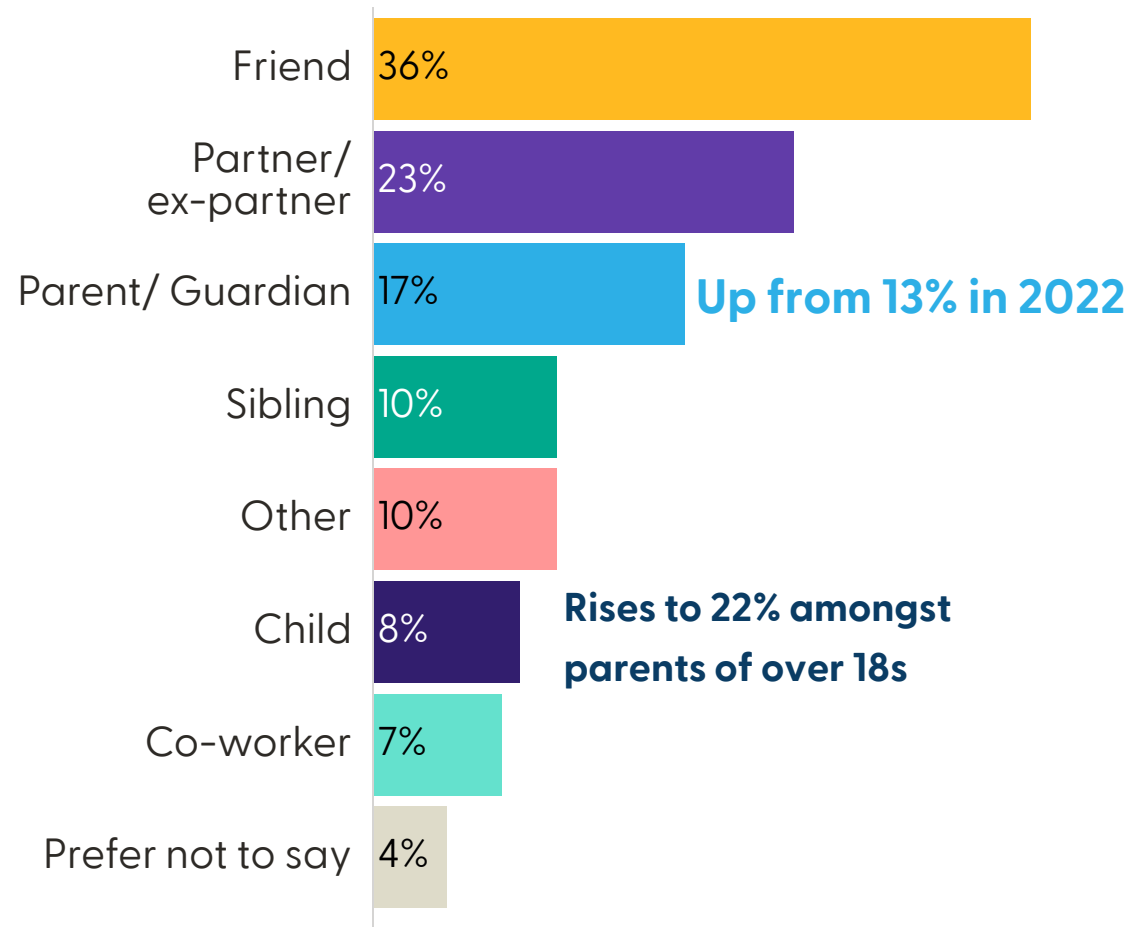


Concern for someone else's drinking in the last 12 months. Base: all UK adults (2023=10,473; 2022=6,318; 2021=9,137)  
In 2021, the question wording included 'during the pandemic' compared to 'in the last 12 months' in 2022 and 2023

# Whose drinking are people concerned about?

People are most likely to be concerned about drinking of their friends, partner and parents

% of those concerned about someone else's drinking



Whose drinking are you concerned about? Base: all UK adults who have been concerned about someone else's drinking in last 12 months (n=2,735)

## Concerned about...



### Friends

- More likely to be reported by males (44% vs 30% female)
- More than two in five 18-24s are concerned about friends (44%)
- Half (51%) of those living with friends/housemates are concerned about a friend's drinking



### Partner/ex-partner

- More likely to be reported by females (28% vs 17% male)
- Rises to 30% of those drinking 4+ times a week

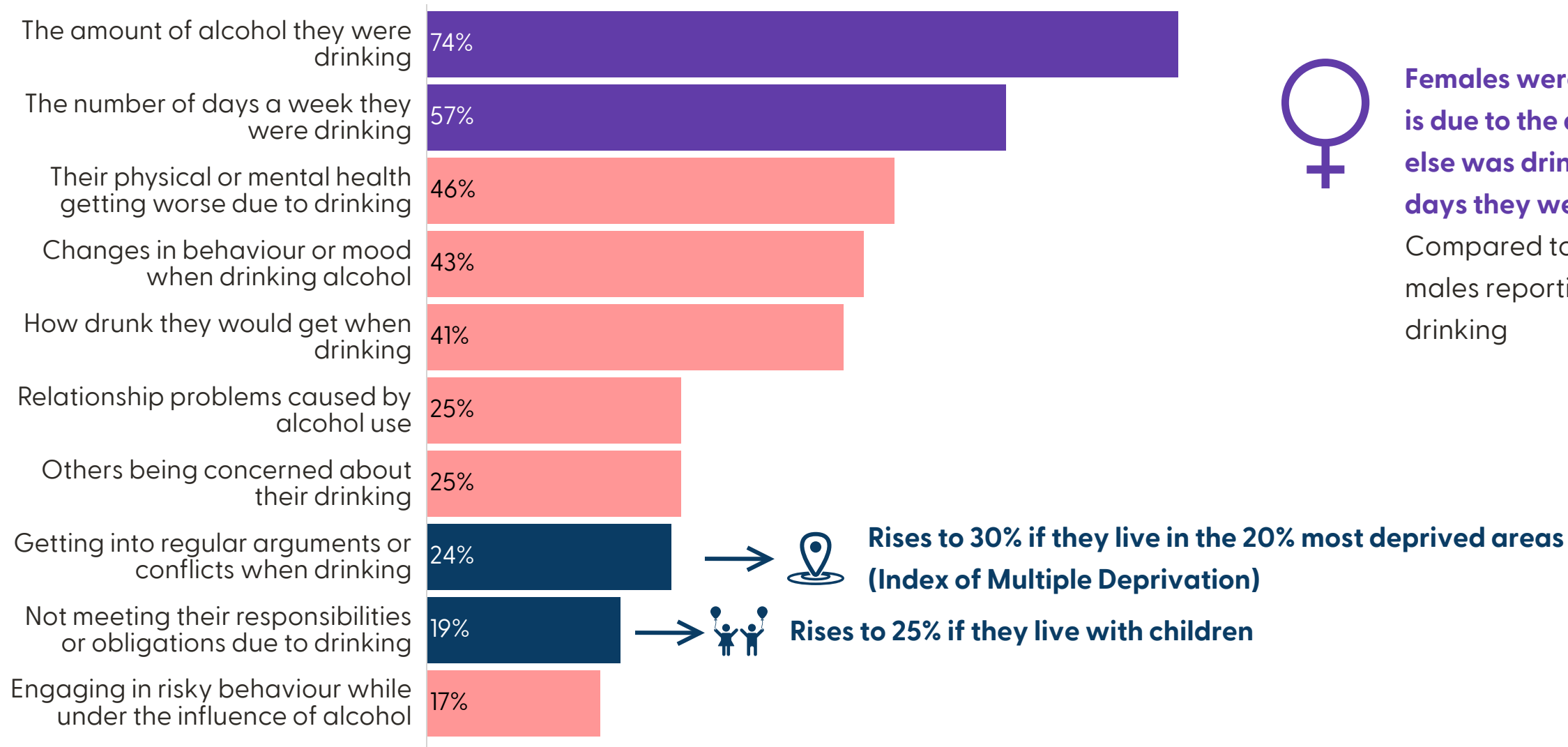


### Parent/guardian:

- The younger someone is, the more likely they are to be concerned about parents (33% of 18-34s vs 15% of 35-54s and 2% of 55+)

# They are most concerned about the amount of alcohol someone drinks

Three in four people concerned about someone else's drinking indicate that it is due to the amount of alcohol that person drinks, more so than the number of days they drink on



Females were more likely to report that this is due to the amount of alcohol someone else was drinking (76%) and the number of days they were drinking on (61%)

Compared to 70% and 51% respectively for males reporting concern for someone else's drinking



Rises to 30% if they live in the 20% most deprived areas (Index of Multiple Deprivation)

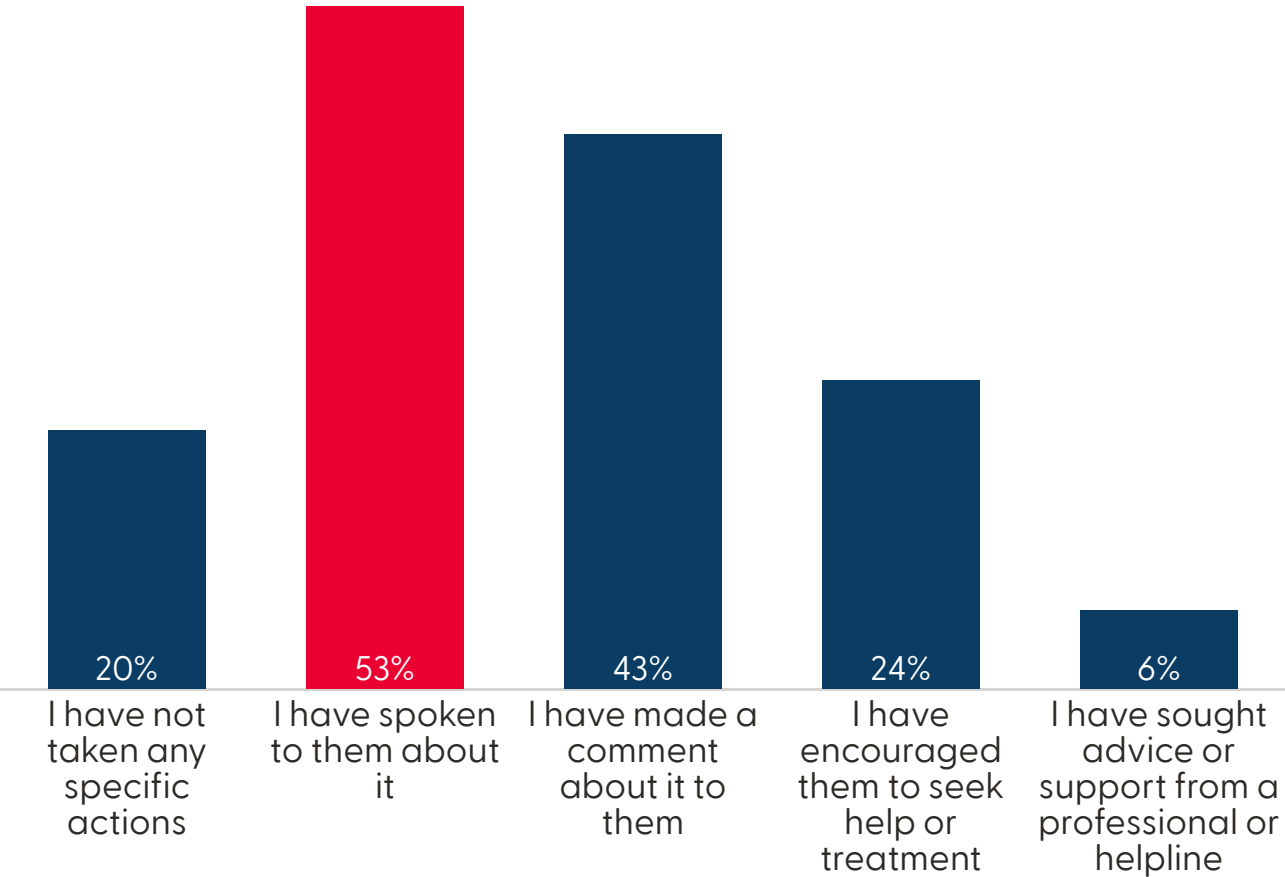


Rises to 25% if they live with children

What caused the concern. Base: all UK adults who have been concerned about someone else's drinking in last 12 months (n=2,735)

# Over half of UK adults who have been concerned about someone else's drinking have spoken to them about this

26% of UK adults have been concerned about someone else's drinking in the last 12 months and of these, over half (53%) have spoken to the person about their drinking and 43% have made a comment about it to them



I have spoken to my husband about his drinking loads of times over the years. He probably thinks I'm nagging him.  
(Individual interview participant)



I am concerned about the amount my friend drinks and that he drinks every day. I have sort of jokingly mentioned it to him, but never got into a full conversation.  
(Focus group participant)

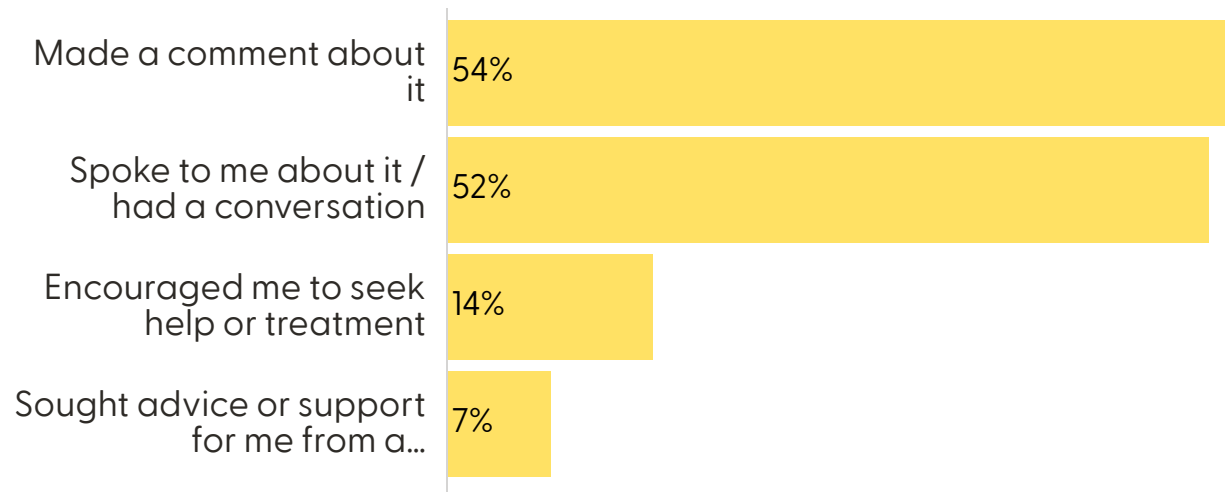
Actions to address drinking concern. Base: all UK adults who have been concerned about someone else's drinking in last 12 months (n=2,735)


# But amongst drinkers, very few say someone has raised a concern with them about their drinking

**One in ten (11%) of drinkers report that a relative, friend or health professional has been concerned about their drinking, with only 4% stating a concern has been raised in the last year**

7% have had a concern raised but not in the last year; 89% have never had someone raise a concern about their drinking.

**Of those who have had a concern raised, most say it was made during either a comment or a conversation**



 Actions taken by contact to address drinking concern. Base: all UK adults who have had concern raised about their own drinking (n=941)

## Do some comments or conversations fall on deaf ears?



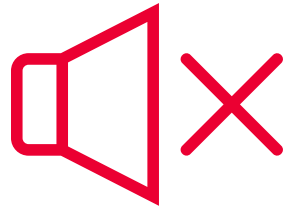
We know from the qualitative research that people may raise their concern about someone else's drinking by making a joke or sarcastic comment and that some conversations are framed as a general conversation about drinking rather than raising specific concerns. It may be that drinkers are either unaware of this underlying concern, or that they choose to ignore this.



My wife has made some comments, 'hey, you need to stop drinking', that kind of thing. I never took it as serious, I thought it was joke.

(Individual interview participant)

# One in five of those concerned have not taken any action



20% of UK adults concerned about someone else's drinking in the last 12 months 'have not taken any specific action'



Qualitative research revealed various barriers to starting conversations with someone about their drinking



## Expecting denial / an argument

Knowing or suspecting that the person will deny they have an unhealthy or problematic relationship with alcohol and will become angry and defensive



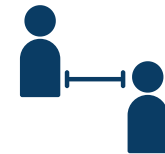
## Fear of damaging relationships

People worry the conversation could have a detrimental impact on their relationship with the person



## Conversation feels pointless

Low expectations, sometimes based on previous experiences, that the conversation will have an impact on the person's drinking habits



## Don't feel it is their place to raise concerns

Some feel they are not close enough to raise their concerns or that someone else closer to the person should be the one to have this conversation




## Not knowing how to broach the subject

Don't know how to start the conversation or what to say without sounding judgemental or accusatory




## Need to be 100% sure there is a problem

If the concern is about someone they do not live with, some people are reluctant to start a conversation in case they are 'blowing things out of proportion'




“We probably make light of [my friend’s drinking] as a group of men. I know it’s not a laughing matter, but it is what he’s about on a weekend. I don’t think for a moment we’d be able to make any changes to how he lives his life.

I don’t think I’m close enough [to have a more serious conversation with him] to be honest. I don’t think it would be my place to do so. And I don’t want to break the relationship and the friendship we have.”  
(Individual interview participant)



“I suppose in childhood, I saw my dad try to speak to my mum [about her drinking]. I remember seeing him pouring her drinks down the sink and then the outrage that would follow that, the throwing of plates and destructive behaviour. To be honest, I think it’s mainly fear that is the main reason that I haven’t brought it up. Fear of her reaction. Also, I just don’t think she’ll change no matter what I say.”  
(Focus group participant)



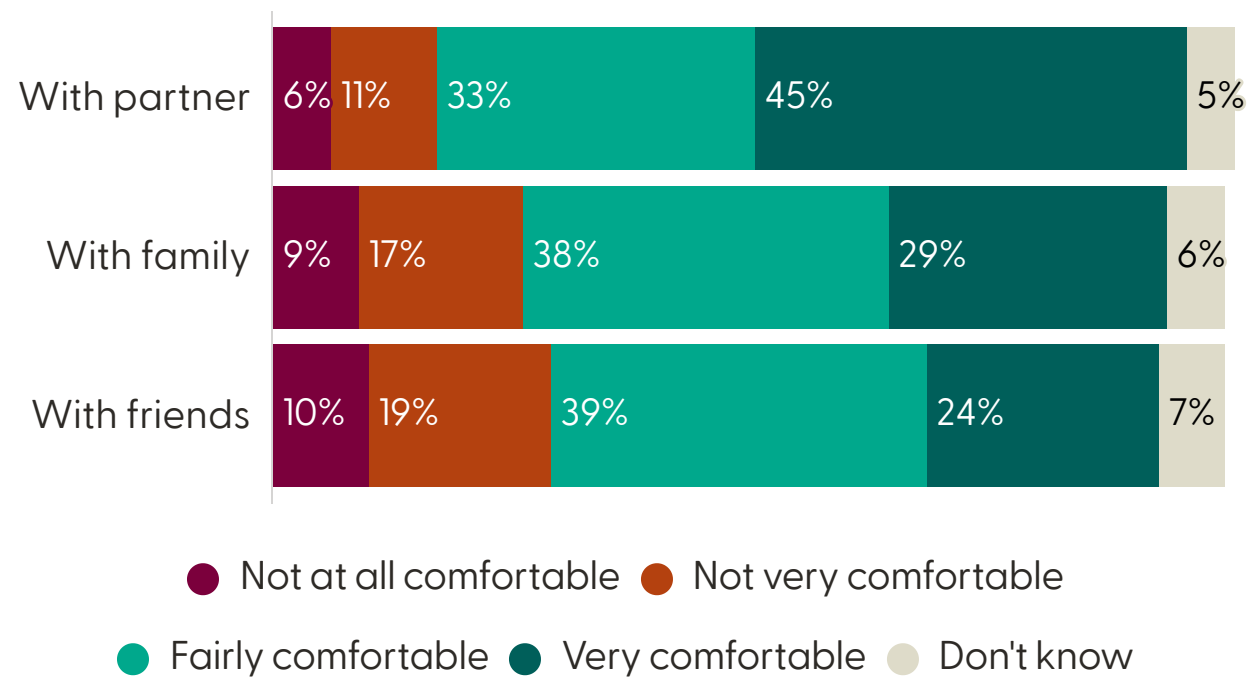
“You are saying to that person, you need help, you have a problem, you are judging them. Have I got the right to do that? In my friend’s case, he is highly functioning, no visible effects to anyone other than someone who knows him well. What right do I have to say something? I think they would have been better off reducing or stopping but maybe it isn't as significant an issue as I feel it is.”  
(Focus group participant)

## Quotes from qualitative research



# How comfortable people feel starting conversations about someone's drinking can depend on the relationship

The Monitor data shows that over three-quarters of people (78%) would feel comfortable starting a conversation with their partner about their drinking



## Starting a conversation with parents about their drinking can be difficult



Several participants in the qualitative research were concerned about the drinking habits of their parents (and some have been concerned since childhood), but have not felt able to have a conversation with them about this.

They often feel it is difficult to reverse roles and 'parent the parent' and that their parent would react badly to being told by their child what they should or should not be doing.

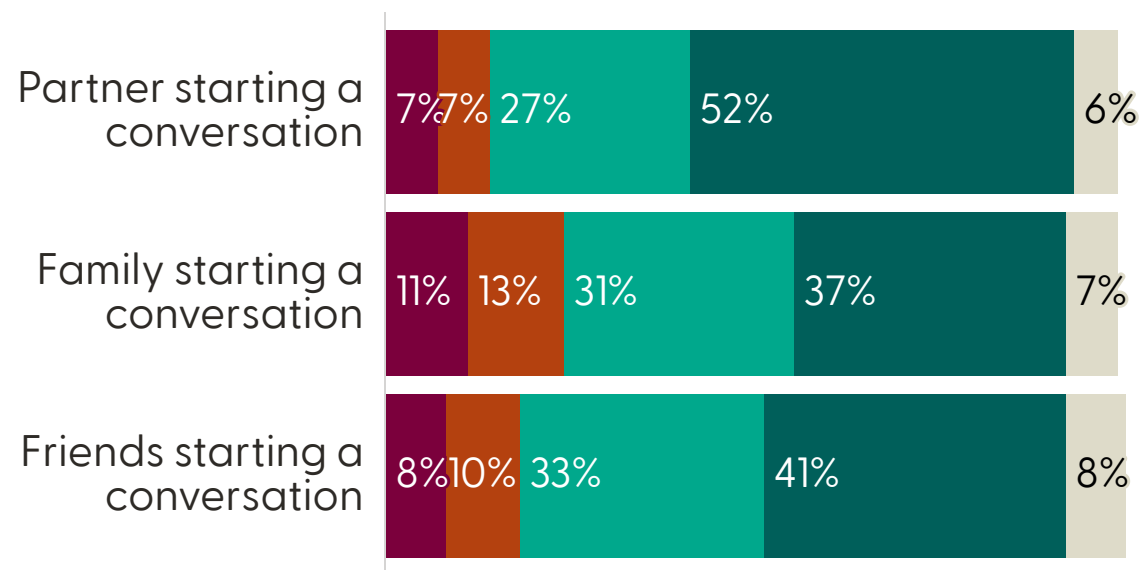


When I was younger, my dad used to drink a lot. And it was tough. But I wouldn't have been able to say anything to my dad is the honest answer. Being Indian, you had to show a certain amount of respect. (Focus group participant)

Comfort starting conversations about drinking. Base: all UK adults excluding 'not applicable'.  
With partner (n=8,344); With family (n=9,610); With friend (n=9,691)

# People would be most comfortable to have a conversation about their own drinking with a partner

One in four drinkers would not feel very comfortable if a family member started a conversation about concerns they have for their drinking



● Not at all comfortable 
 ● Not very comfortable  
● Fairly comfortable 
 ● Very comfortable 
 ● Don't know

Comfort if someone starts a conversation about their drinking. Base: all UK drinkers with not applicable and prefer not to say excluded. By partner (n=6,294); By family (n=7,208); By friends (n=7,232)



## Partners are also seen by others as the most appropriate person to have this conversation

The qualitative research revealed that people often do not raise concerns about another person's drinking as they feel it is 'not their place' to do so, even when the concern is about a close friend or family member. Participants sometimes felt it is the person's partner or spouse who should be broaching the subject and participants agreed they would feel most comfortable speaking with their partner.



I feel like maybe I'm not the person to speak to my dad about it. I feel that maybe it should be his wife. I can be there for support if he needs it but he just shuts me down if I speak about it. And it does affect my relationship with him.

(Focus group participant)

# More than half of people not raising a concern do not feel comfortable starting a conversation with friends or family about their drinking

**55% of UK adults who have not taken any action about concerns they have for a friend's drinking report that they are not very comfortable or not comfortable at all starting a conversation with them about it**

- This is a similar level for a family member's drinking (54% are not very comfortable or not comfortable at all)
- They are much more comfortable raising a concern they have about a partner's drinking (30% not very comfortable or not comfortable at all)



**We are most likely to be concerned about a friend's drinking**

Of those concerned about someone else's drinking, 36% indicate it is a friend's drinking



**But we are least comfortable having a conversation with them**

Three in ten (29%) UK adults are not very comfortable or not comfortable at all starting a conversation about a friend's drinking



**Females feel most uncomfortable about having this conversation**

A third (33%) of females are not very comfortable or not comfortable at all starting a conversation about a friend's drinking, compared to 25% of males

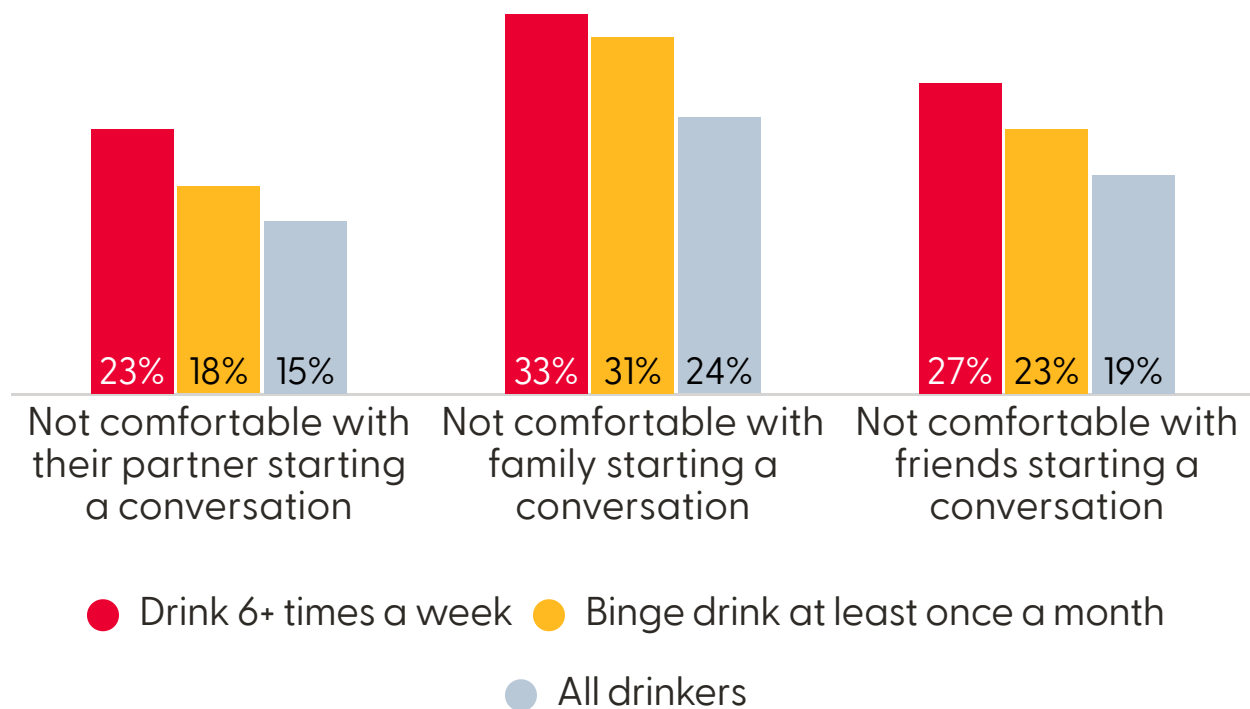


All figures reported exclude those who selected 'not applicable'

# People who drink themselves are more likely to feel uncomfortable raising concerns with others about their drinking



Those who drink most often and binge drink are less comfortable with others raising concerns about their drinking



## The qualitative research found that these people can feel hypocritical speaking to someone else about their drinking



“ Sometimes I feel like I’m being a hypocrite because I like a drink. You know, it’s not illegal to drink. (Individual interview participant)

High risk drinkers in the qualitative research (defined using AUDIT-C questions) also found that people who drink excessively themselves are not always the most useful people to turn to for support.

“ A couple of friends I spoke to probably weren't the best people to talk to because I think they are dealing with their own problems with alcohol. They were like ‘enjoy it, it’s fine’. (Individual interview participant)



Comfort if someone starts a conversation about their drinking. Base: all UK drinkers with not applicable and prefer not to say excluded. By partner (n=6,294); By family (n=7,208); By friends (n=7,232)

# How do these conversations usually start?



The qualitative research revealed that whilst some conversations about a concern over someone's drinking habits are planned in advance, many are spontaneous and may be prompted by specific incidents. Conversations and comments may have been ongoing for many years.



## May start with one-off comments

- Often made whilst the person is drinking (e.g. 'haven't you had enough?')
- Repeated comments over time may be a precursor to having a more in-depth conversation



## Planned conversations

- Usually occur after concerns about the person's drinking habits have been felt for some time
- May take place with other people or after consulting other people about concerns
- Drinker may feel 'ambushed' and be defensive



## Spontaneous conversations

- Often occur when a person is drunk or the day after the person has been drinking heavily
- May be prompted by a specific drink-related incident, e.g. if someone injures themselves or has an argument when drunk
- May be prompted by a comment the drinker themselves makes about their drinking



Comments, spontaneous and planned conversations may be **ongoing for several years**, particularly when people live in the same household and/or are in a very close relationship (e.g. spouses, siblings, parent/child).

# Case studies: a spontaneous and a planned conversation



## A spontaneous conversation

- Sarah has been becoming concerned about the frequency of her friend's drinking
- Both friends are in their early 30s
- During a walk at the weekend, Sarah's friend mentioned how drunk she had been the night before and this prompted Sarah to voice her concerns

"The conversation was quite **informal**. She was saying that she was hungover but that she hadn't drunk in ages, but I knew that wasn't true, so I said you were out at that party last weekend and then that work thing and **I just said maybe you are drinking too much too often and you should calm it down a bit**. She was a bit surprised and said that 'everyone is like that', but I said no, we've all calmed down. It wasn't like a sit-down intervention or anything. **We were just talking and it ended up turning into a proper chat**. There wasn't a lot of back and forth, but it was all OK and she agreed maybe she should cut it out for a bit."

Case studies based on qualitative feedback



## A planned conversation

- Dembe's mother-in-law was concerned about her husband's drinking
- Dembe took his father-in-law to a sporting event and planned in advance to mention it whilst there
- He had researched support groups in the local area in advance and felt comfortable giving this to his father-in-law

"My mother-in-law was upset about her husband's drinking and I volunteered to have a chat to him because he respects me. **I decided to take him to a rugby match and speak to him there**. I bought him a pint and he said 'I needed that'. I saw this as a way in and so I said your wife has concerns about your drinking. I wasn't sure what the best way was to start the conversation without embarrassing him or making him feel bad. **I was very direct, trying to say I'm sure you are aware there have been concerns, all the family has observed this but we all love you, and this comes from love**. I said that I am not an expert, but it might be a good idea to contact someone for help. I don't know if he has done this yet."

# The goal of these conversations is to enable people to accept that they have unhealthy or harmful drinking habits



Qualitative feedback suggests the **long-term** hope behind raising these concerns is that the person will change their drinking habits, i.e. stop drinking altogether/cut down.



But people recognise that to do this, the drinker has to be **ready to accept that they have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol.**



I was hoping she would twig and maybe think, oh wait not everyone is drinking like me, maybe I should scale it back a bit, maybe I should do something about this.

(Individual interview participant)



The **immediate** goals of the conversations are to try to get the person to understand:

- that the level and/or frequency with which they are drinking is not healthy
- the various different impacts that their drinking is having, i.e. on their health, their work, their relationships etc.
- that the concern comes from a place of love and that they are there to support them and help them

# People try different strategies to get people to see that they have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol



The participants in the qualitative research who have had conversations with someone about their drinking used different strategies to encourage people to understand they may be drinking in a problematic way (and participants may use all of these if conversations are ongoing):

## Accusation or 'shock tactic'

“ With me, I just go for the jugular. I try to make him feel bad saying we lost our brother to alcohol, I don't want to lose you too.  
(Focus group participant)

## Supportive, or 'softly, softly'

“ Our early conversations started with 'I see you have a problem, you need help, we can help and support you'.  
(Focus group participant)

## Providing 'evidence'

“ I just said you seem to be on a different level to everyone else. Everyone is having a drink but you are having multiple drinks and pushing it to the extreme.  
(Focus group participant)



People who have had these conversations would **advise others** in the same situation to :

- forewarn people who you are concerned about that you would like to speak to them about concerns so that people don't feel ambushed and are less likely to become aggressive or defensive
- say a minimal amount in the initial conversation and follow up on this a few days/weeks afterwards, allowing people to digest what has been said and the concerns raised



# Conversations often focus on how often or how much someone is drinking and the impact of this, but not the reasons why they drink

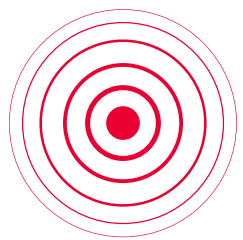


In the qualitative research, many of the conversations about concerns over someone else's drinking focused on their drinking habits and/or the impact of their drinking and not always on why they feel the need to drink like this.



## Focus on amount drunk and frequency of drinking

- no off switch / can't seem to stop at one or two
- always get drunk at the weekend/when going out
- drinking every day/most days



## Focus on impact of drinking

- impact on current or future health
- impact on relationships
- impact on work



## But should more focus be on understanding the reasons why people are drinking?

Although some participants said they did try to speak about why people are drinking, many did not appear to discuss this, and particularly not during initial conversations.



I think when someone is coming at you and you're not prepared for it and it's not in a supportive way, it can be quite difficult. People need to understand that if drinking has been a big feature in your life for a long time, it's not that easy to just say to somebody to 'stop now'. There's so much that needs to be put into place first, to understand why a person drinks.  
(Individual interview participant)

# Denial and defensiveness are the most common reactions from the person whose drinking is a concern



Common reactions encountered in the qualitative research when concerns have been raised include:



**Denial or defensiveness**



I don't think he sees himself as having a drink problem. He says 'I'm not an alcoholic, I don't need a drink when I get up in the morning. I've worked hard, I'm just relaxing'.

(Individual interview participant)



**Surprise**



We live quite far from my daughter so we have conversations over the phone or over WhatsApp or text about it. But she gets very angry. She doesn't seem able to discuss it in a civilised manner at all.

(Focus group participant)



**Feeling judged or attacked**



My friend's reaction was 'what are you talking about? You need to loosen up a bit'.

(Focus group participant)



**Angry or argumentative**



**Embarrassed**



**Uninterested**

# Challenging perceptions of what is 'problematic drinking' may help in overcoming defensiveness and denial



Perceptions on 'normal' or 'acceptable' drinking behaviours and traditional views of 'an alcoholic' appear to strongly influence the extent to which someone accepts that their relationship with alcohol may not be healthy.



## "But everyone drinks like this"

The qualitative research revealed that when challenged about their drinking behaviours, many people denied they had a problem and feel that lots of people drink in a similar way.

Perceptions around 'normal' or 'acceptable' drinking levels are often influenced on the drinking of people around you, particularly parents and friends.



Everyone has a different perspective on what is normal [drinking levels]. I think it's whatever you have been brought up around.

(Individual interview participant)



## "I'm not an alcoholic"

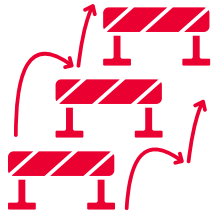
When challenged, some people denied that their drinking was problematic as they did not fit the traditional view of someone with an alcohol addiction, i.e. someone who needs a drink in the morning, who cannot hold down a job, or is homeless.



There's always an excuse or a justification for [her drinking]. Sometimes she would say well, alcoholics drink in the morning and it's not the morning now. I mean some days she will wait till one minute past 12 just to have that satisfaction that it's not the morning.

(Focus group participant)

# What did qualitative participants feel would help others who would like to initiate a conversation about someone else's drinking?



## What did participants think might help them to overcome some of the barriers to having these conversations?

- Tips on best time and place to start conversations
- Example conversation starters, and what to say/what not to say
- Strategies to help overcome denial or defensiveness
- Guidance on how best to support people if they are receptive to help



## What did we learn from participants on how to broach the subject and what to say?

- It might be helpful to speak to other people close to the person first to see if they share the same concerns
- Giving the person some forewarning of concerns and/or the desire to have a conversation can give the person some time to digest the concerns and may mean they are less defensive and are more 'ready' to have the conversation
- Choose somewhere safe and have the conversation when all parties are sober; participants found it is sometimes easier to have a conversation when doing something else together, e.g. walking, driving, at a sporting event
- Make it clear from the start that the concerns come from a place of love and that you are there to support
- Try to stay calm, and if the conversation escalates into an argument, it may be better to leave it and come back to it at a later date
- The message may be better received if coming from someone who does not also drink in ways that could be considered problematic

# The Monitor data shows that speaking about concerns can have an impact

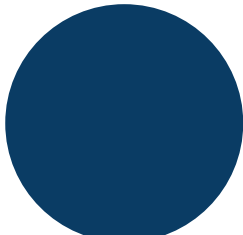


A third (35%) of drinkers who had a concern raised about their drinking indicated that they made changes as a result

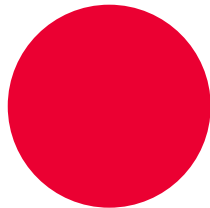


Starting a conversation about someone's drinking appears to be more effective than just making a comment

% of those who had a concern raised about their drinking indicating that they took actions as a result



44%



32%

- Someone had a conversation with them
- Someone just made a comment



Actions taken by contact to address drinking concern. Base: all UK adults who have had concern raised about their own drinking (n=941)



But ultimately, the impact may depend on how the comment or conversation is received

Qualitative research did also show that conversations appear to have more impact than one-off comments, but ultimately the impact seems to depend on whether the drinker is open to accepting that their drinking habits may be unhealthy.



My aunt is in complete denial. My cousin and our son have also tried to speak to her, but we are all met with this barrier of denial. I think it is very difficult or impossible to help someone if they are in denial, unless they want to help themselves. (Focus group participant)

# For some qualitative participants, these conversations have had a positive impact on the 'drinker' (even if it doesn't feel like it at the time)



**Some people may immediately change their drinking habits**



**But more often, any changes take time**



**And conversations can be having an impact even if they don't feel like they are**



My friend was a bit surprised when I said I felt she was maybe drinking too much, but I think she did take it to heart; she wasn't drinking the last few times we met up. (Individual interview participant)



We are now a year and a half down the line and it's something that he talks very openly about with us. But it's taken a long time to get to that point. It was really difficult at first, but now we've broached the subject, we've kind of got over that difficult part and it is something he will talk to us about now. (Focus group participant)



I haven't really changed my drinking but it does keep coming into my head, like a reminder, are you going to cut down? Are you going to do anything? So that conversation feels like it has had some level of impact. (Individual interview participant)

# Can drinkers reach out for support without being judged?



**Three in five (59%) UK adults do not think our society is understanding of people with drinking problems**

This level of disagreement rises to 65% in Scotland



**Half (53%) of UK adults agree that people with drinking problems can reach out for support without being judged**

34% disagree with this statement, rising to 37% amongst 18-34 year olds and 39% in AB social grades



**Two thirds (67%) of UK adults have never been asked to complete an alcohol assessment**

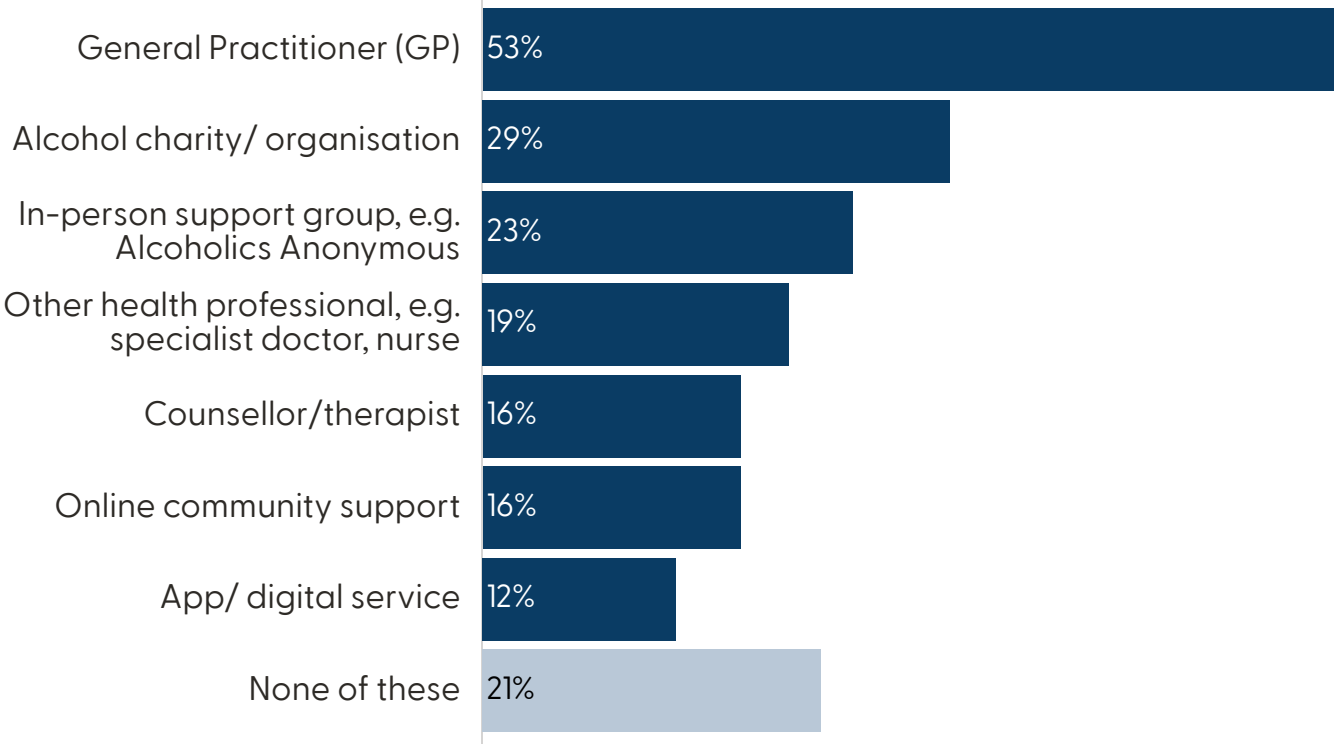
If they have, it is most likely to have been at a GP surgery (23%) or other healthcare setting (7%)



**7% of UK adults have contacted a service or organisation for advice about alcohol**

4% did so for someone else and 3% made contact for themselves

**If a drinker needed support or advice about alcohol, half would reach out to a GP; one in five would not reach out to any support service**



Where drinkers would reach out for support or advice about alcohol. Base: all UK adults who drink (n = 9,035)

# Seeking professional support is not always suggested during conversations, but most say they would feel comfortable doing this



Several qualitative participants had suggested to the person they were concerned about that they should consider seeking professional help. This was more likely to be mentioned when:

- the perception is that the person's drinking has become seriously harmful and problematic
- the person has reacted well to the initial concerns being raised

However of those who have suggested this, very few people appear to have gone on to seek support, with most people responding that they didn't think it was necessary or that they felt able to change without this support.

Some participants had suggested moderation techniques the person could try or had suggested alcohol-free activities they could do together, such as going for a walk, rather than going out to pubs or bars etc.



I did suggest he should maybe speak to the GP and I said I would go with him and support him to do that, or look online or something, but he said he didn't feel he needed to do that, that maybe he would just try not having alcohol in the house."

(Individual interview participant)



It is just something that would never, ever happen. My mum says it's a generational thing. That because my dad is old and stuck in his ways, and its just something that his generation wouldn't even consider.

(Individual interview participant)



It is nice to stay, 'stop it'. But if this is addiction, this is a serious issue that requires professional people to address.

(Focus group participant)



# Why people drink

## Exploring reasons for drinking

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### Take me to...

[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2023](#) | [What people think about their drinking](#) | [Concern and conversations](#) | [Why people drink](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [About Drinkaware](#); [About PS Research](#) | [Appendix](#)

# Why people drink: **what to look out for**



People are most likely to report drinking alcohol for the taste, particularly if they are older and in higher social grades



Younger drinkers are more likely to drink for enhancement and social reasons, especially males, and are more likely to think it is ok to get drunk as long as they are not impacting on anyone else



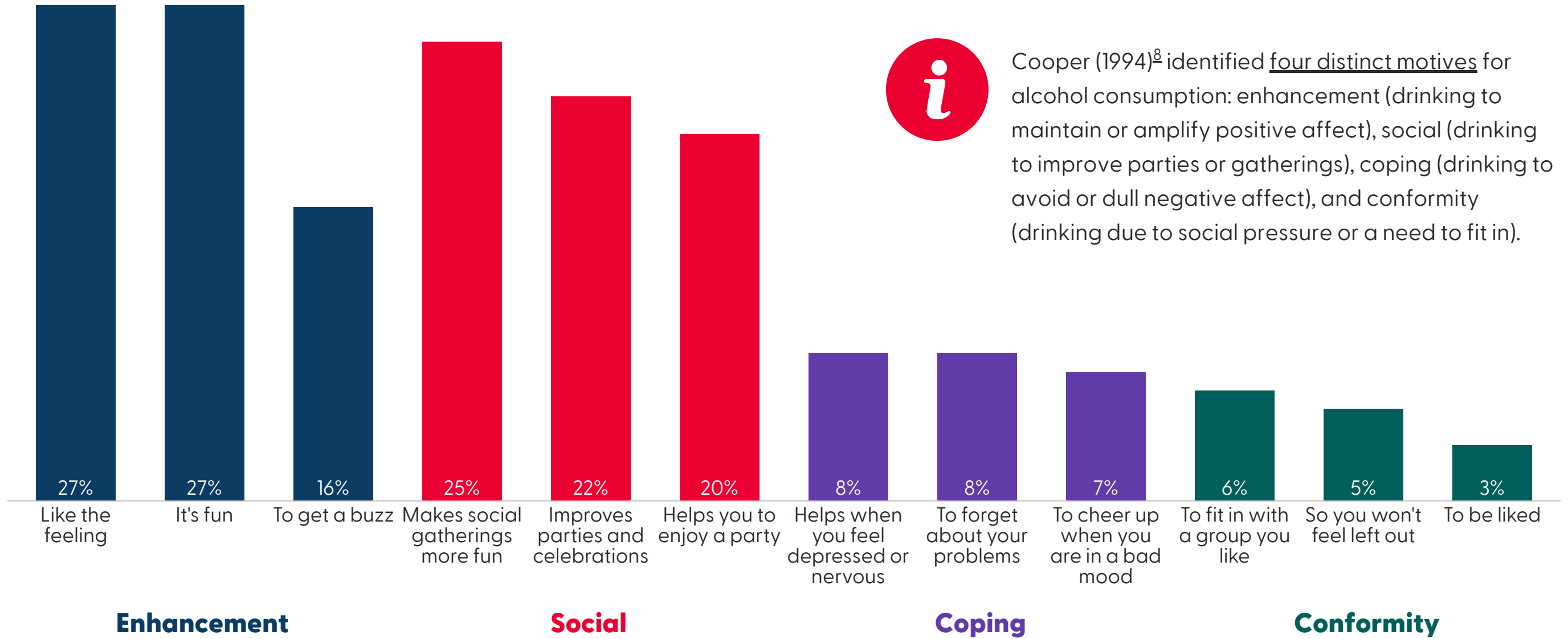
Younger drinkers are also more likely than others to drink to feel more confident and overcome shyness, with drinkers in ethnic minority groups also more likely to drink for confidence reasons



Different groups of drinkers drink for different coping reasons, whether that is parents drinking to help them unwind or those with a severe mental health rating drinking because it helps them when they feel depressed or nervous

# People are most likely to drink for enhancement and social reasons

Reasons people give for drinking alcohol (% who most of the time / always drink for the following reasons) - DMQ-R



Cooper (1994)<sup>8</sup> identified four distinct motives for alcohol consumption: enhancement (drinking to maintain or amplify positive affect), social (drinking to improve parties or gatherings), coping (drinking to avoid or dull negative affect), and conformity (drinking due to social pressure or a need to fit in).



Drinking motivations (DMQ-R). Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=9,035)

# A new look at reasons for drinking alcohol amongst UK drinkers

In the 2023 Monitor, a new set of drinking motivations were also included in the questionnaire. These were taken from the Drinking Motives Questionnaire for Adults (DMQ-A), providing an alternative view to the DMQ-R used in previous Monitors.



D'Aquino, S., Callinan, S., Smit, K., Mojica-Perez, Y., & Kuntsche, E. (2022)<sup>2</sup> developed and validated a new set of drinking motives for adults. The Drinking Motives Questionnaire for Adults (DMQ-A) covers five areas:



**Confidence** - drinking to reduce social inhibition



**Coping** - drinking to cope with negative mood



**Social** - drinking to facilitate positive social interaction



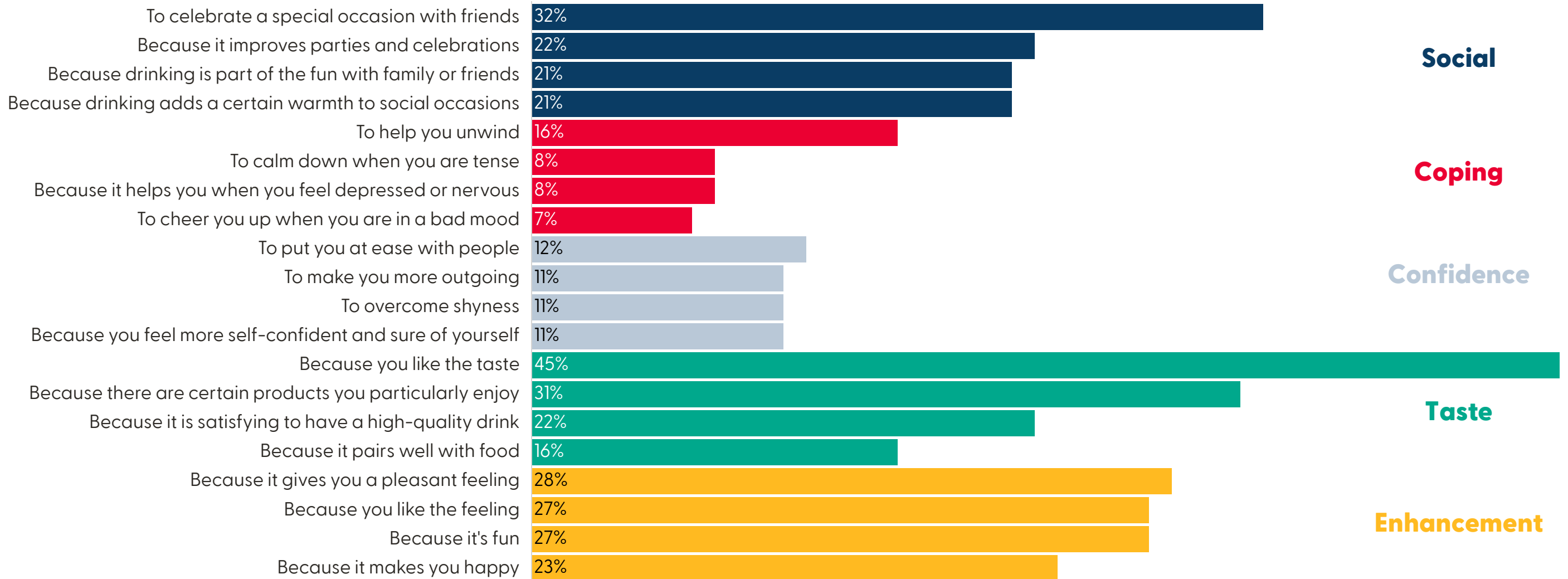
**Taste** - drinking for enjoyment of the taste



**Enhancement** - drinking for the pleasant feeling it provides

# People are most likely to report that they drink for the taste

Reasons people give for drinking alcohol (% who most of the time / always drink for the following reasons)



Drinking reasons (DMQ-A). Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (n=9,035)

# Drinking for the taste



## Younger people are less likely to report drinking alcohol because they like the taste

41% of 18-34 year olds indicated that they mostly/always drink because they 'like the taste', compared to 48% of 35 to 54 year olds



## There is a group of younger males in higher social grades who report finding it satisfying to have a high quality drink

34% of males aged 18 to 34 in social grades ABC1 often/always drink alcohol because it is satisfying to have a high quality drink (compared to 21% of all other drinkers)



Half (52%) of this group often/always choose **beer** when drinking alcohol



## People in higher social grades are more likely to report drinking alcohol for the taste

Half (50%) of drinkers in social grades AB mostly/always drink alcohol **because they like the taste**, compared to 41% of drinkers in DE social grades

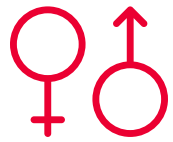
A third (35%) of drinkers in social grades AB mostly/always drink alcohol **because there are certain products they particularly enjoy**, compared to 28% of drinkers in DE social grades



## The more someone eats out, the more likely they were to report that they drink alcohol because it pairs well with food

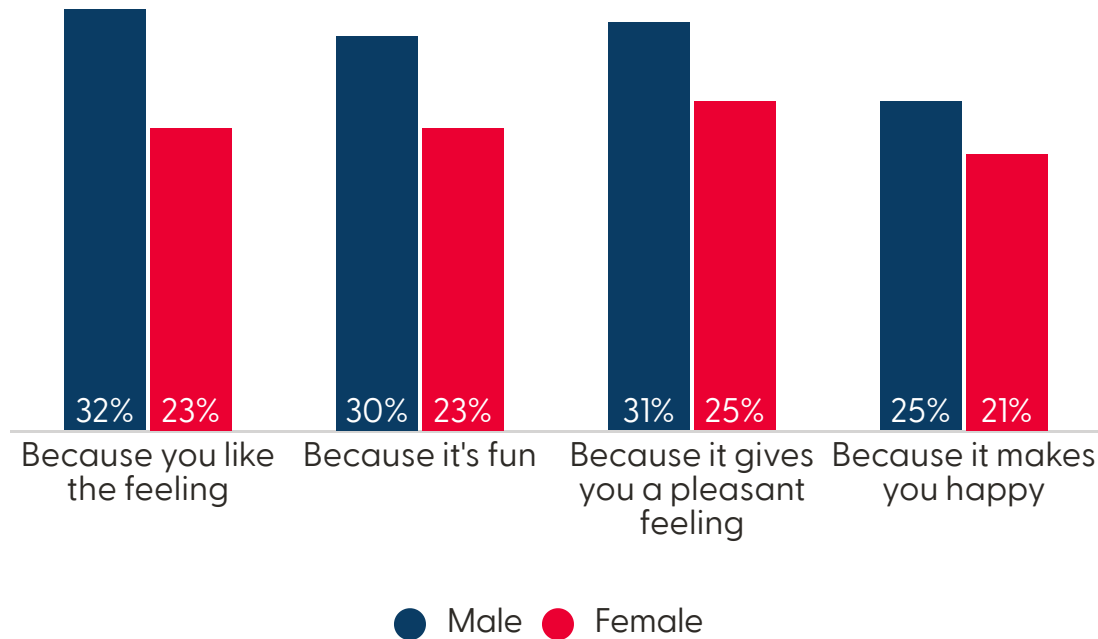
36% of those who eat out weekly drink because it pairs well with food, compared to 14% who occasionally eat out

# Drinking for enhancement reasons



**Male drinkers are more likely than females to drink for enhancement**

% most of the time/ always



**18 to 34 year olds are twice as likely as those aged 55 or over to report drinking alcohol 'because it's fun'**

- 38% of 18-34 year olds mostly/always drink because it's fun, compared to 17% of those aged 55+
- They are also more likely to drink alcohol for other enhancement reasons, including liking the feeling (30% mostly/always compared to 23% of those aged 55+) and because it makes them happy (25% compared to 18%)



**Drinkers in higher social grades are also more likely to drink alcohol for enhancement reasons**

- Because they like the feeling - 30% of drinkers in AB social grades mostly/always drink for this reason compared to 23% of drinkers in DE social grades
- Because it gives them a pleasant feeling - 30% of drinkers in AB social grades mostly/always drink for this reason compared to 24% of drinkers in DE social grades



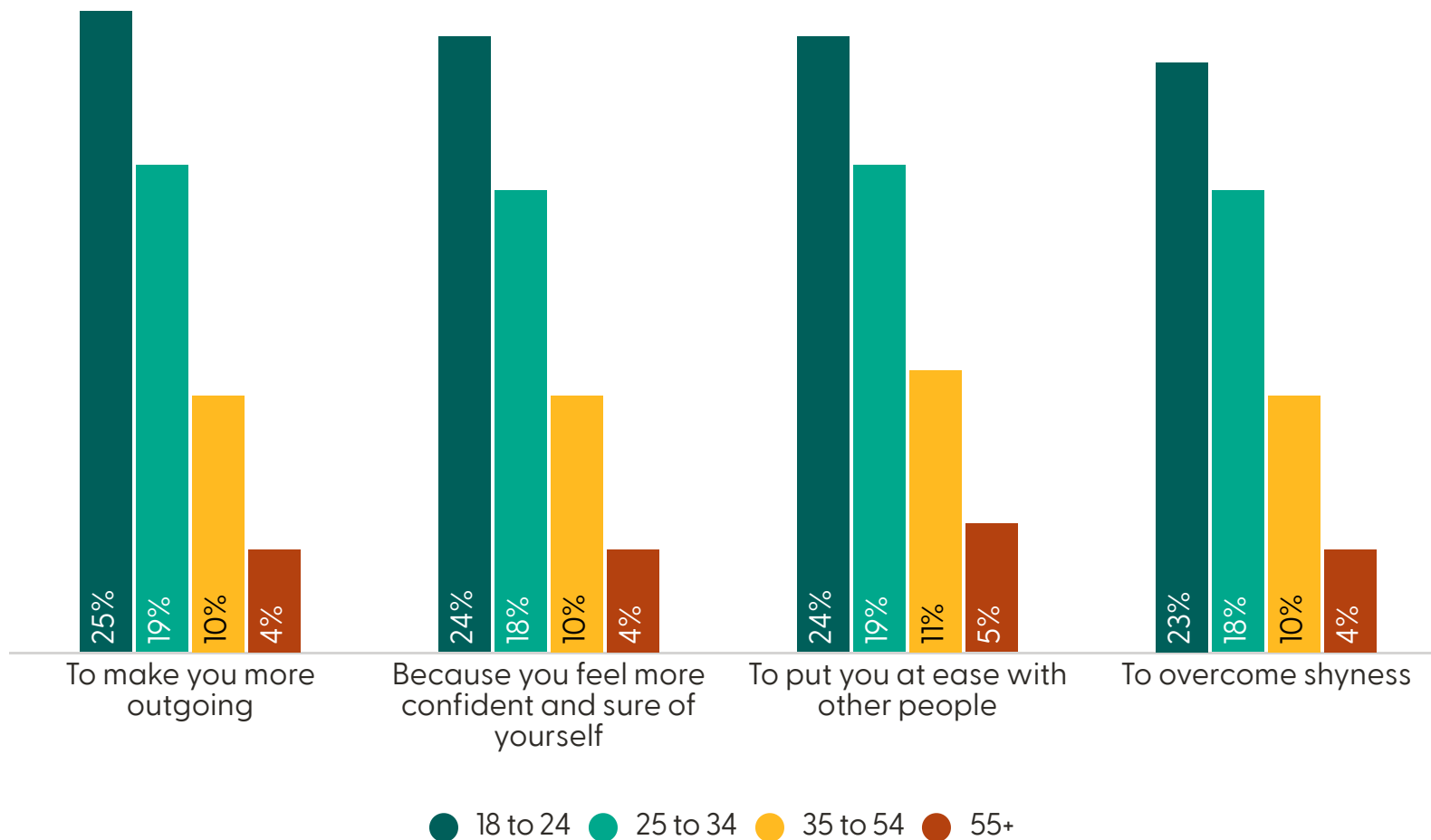
Drinking reasons for enhancement by gender (DMQ-A). Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (males=4,324; females=4,711)

# Drinking for confidence reasons



Younger drinkers are much more likely to drink to feel more confident and overcome shyness

% most of the time/ always



Drinkers in ethnic minority groups are also more likely to drink for confidence reasons

- 15% of drinkers in an ethnic minority group mostly/always drink **to overcome shyness**, compared to 10% of White drinkers
- 16% of drinkers in an ethnic minority group mostly/always drink because it **makes them feel more confident** and sure of themselves, compared to 11% of White drinkers
- 18% of drinkers in an ethnic minority group mostly/always drink to **put them at ease with other people**, compared to 11% of White drinkers



Drinking reasons for confidence by age (DMQ-A). Base: all UK adults who drink alcohol (18 to 24=802; 25 to 34=1,434; 35 to 54=3,059; 55+=3,740)





# Drinking for coping reasons

Different groups of drinkers appear to drink for different coping reasons



**Young people and those in ethnic minority groups are more likely to report drinking to cheer themselves up when they are in a bad mood**

- 10% of 18–34 drinkers and 11% of drinkers in ethnic minority groups mostly/always drink to cheer themselves up when they're in a bad mood
- They are also more likely to drink because it helps them when they feel depressed or nervous



**Parents of under 18s are more likely to report drinking to help them unwind**

- 23% of parents of under 18s mostly/always drink to help them unwind compared to 15% of all other drinkers
- They are also more likely to drink to calm down when they are tense



**Those drinkers with a severe mental health rating are more likely to report drink for all coping reasons than those with a normal rating**

- 29% of drinkers with a severe PHQ rating mostly/always drink **because it helps them when they feel depressed or nervous**, compared to 3% of drinkers with a normal PHQ rating
- 29% of drinkers with a severe PHQ rating mostly/always drink **because it helps them to unwind**, compared to 12% of drinkers with a normal PHQ rating
- 24% of drinkers with a severe PHQ rating mostly/always drink **because it calms them down when they are tense**, compared to 4% of drinkers with a normal PHQ rating



# Drinking for social reasons

People appear more likely to report drinking for social reasons if they are...



## Male

24% mostly/always drink because it is part of the fun with family or friends (18% for females)



## Aged 18 to 34

31% mostly/always drink because it improves parties or celebrations (15% for those aged 55+)



## In ABC1 social grades

23% mostly/always drink because it adds a certain warmth to social occasions (18% for those in C2DE social grades)



## Live with housemates or friends

38% mostly/always drink because it improves parties or celebrations (20% if they live alone)



## To celebrate a special occasion with friends was the most commonly selected social reason overall

- 32% of drinkers mostly/always drink for this reason
- This rises to 38% amongst 18 to 34 year olds



## 17% of drinkers feel alcohol is important to their social life, compared to 19% in 2022

- It is higher for males (20%) and rises to 22% for 18 to 24 year olds
- 41% of drinkers who drink on a night out with friends at least once a week report that alcohol is important to their social life
- Even though the majority (56%) of drinkers report that alcohol is not important to their social life, 23% of these drinkers mostly/always drink to celebrate a special occasion with friends

# The story of social drinking amongst young people aged 18-34



## **18-34 year olds are more likely to say that alcohol is important to their social life and to drink at home less frequently**

17% of 18-34 drinkers say alcohol is important to their social life and drink at home alone less often than weekly (12% for 35-54 drinkers; 7% for drinkers aged 55+).



## **Half (47%) also think it's ok to get drunk as long as they're not impacting on anyone else**

Compared to 42% of 35-54 year olds and 22% of those aged 55+.



## **They are more likely to think it's ok to get drunk and that people encourage others to drink more**

23% of 18-34 drinkers agree it is ok to get drunk regularly as long as you're not doing it everyday (16% 35-54s, 7% 55+).  
80% of 18-34 drinkers agree that people often encourage others to drink or drink more (77% of 35-54s, 73% 55+).



## **But non-drinkers in this age group do appear to feel the impact when others drink**

One in four (25%) of 18-34 year olds who don't drink say they always or often have to explain or justify why they don't and one in five (21%) often feel like an outsider when others are drinking.

# One in ten 18-34 year olds live with housemates/friends



Over half (56%) of 18-34 year olds living with friends are drinking to increasing-, high-risk or possibly dependent levels (AUDIT), compared to 35% of 18-34s living with parents and 36% who live with a partner

## Those living with friends are more likely to regularly...



### Binge drink

46% binge drink at least monthly, compared to 26% who live with parents and 27% who live with a partner



### Go out drinking with friends

22% go for a night out with friends at least once a week, compared to 10% who live with parents and 8% who live with a partner



### Go out for drinks in the afternoon

38% go out for drinks in the afternoon at least once a month, compared to 19% who live with parents and 21% who live with a partner



### Go to the pub

27% go to the pub at least once a week, compared to 12% who live with parents and 15% who live with a partner

## And they are also more likely to...



### Worry about their drinking

14% report often worrying about their drinking over the last 12 months (4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5), compared to 5% who live with parents and 6% who live with a partner



### Feel they will have future health problems

31% feel it is very or fairly likely they will have future health problems due to drinking, compared to 18% who live with parents and 17% who live with a partner



### Try but fail to reduce their drinking levels

18% tried but ultimately failed to reduce their alcohol consumption over the last 12 months, compared to 8% who live with parents and 11% who live with a partner

All data on this page relates to those drinkers aged 18 to 34 only

# Final reflections

And how to find out more

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**Take me to...**

[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2023](#) | [What people think about their drinking](#) | [Concern and conversations](#) | [Why people drink](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [About Drinkaware](#); [About PS Research](#) | [Appendix](#)

# Reflections on the research

The findings from this research highlight that whilst there are some encouraging trends around drinking in the UK, there is more to do to encourage and normalise conversations around alcohol.



## What have we learnt about encouraging and normalising conversations around alcohol?

**Different lifestages** impact on people's drinking habits suggesting messaging around drinking to harmful levels needs to be appropriately targeted.

There is a **disconnect** between how people view their own drinking and that of friends and family compared to how the rest of the nation drink - do we need to do more to understand what is driving this gap?

Conversations about someone else's drinking are often difficult and emotional - more needs to be done to **support and encourage** people to have conversations with others when they are concerned about their drinking.

More education and open discussions about **what 'problematic' drinking really looks like** may help to encourage conversations.

# Interested to find out more?



## More on Drinkaware



### About Drinkaware

Drinkaware is an independent charity which aims to reduce alcohol-related harm.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/about-us>



## More Drinkaware research



### Research and Impact | Drinkaware

Drinkaware ensures our work is founded in research and evidence to further promote how to reduce alcohol misuse and harm in the UK.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research>



## Advice and support



### Advice and support

We can help you learn about the impact of alcohol on you, your family or friends. Here we'll support you with advice, information and strategies to help reduce alcohol consumption and improve your health.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice>

# About PS Research

## Introducing PS Research

We're Adam and Emma: two experienced research specialists based in the North of England.

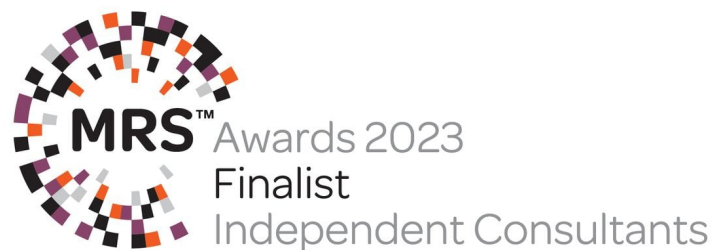
Adam specialises in quantitative research. He spent almost a decade working in local authorities and delivering research projects across the public sector. Adam is a Certified Member of the MRS (Market Research Society) and was named the UK's New Freelancer of the Year in 2019 by IPSE (the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed).

Emma specialises in qualitative research. She spent several years working agency-side for a couple of large, international market research agencies. Emma is a member of the AQR (Association of Qualitative Research).



PS Research is an accredited Market Research Society Company Partner, demonstrating our commitment to quality research and compliance, working to the MRS Code of Conduct.

In 2023, we were shortlisted as a Finalist in the MRS Awards (Independent Consultants category - winner to be announced Dec '23)





# Appendix

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## Take me to...

[Introducing the research](#) | [Highlights](#) | [Drinking in the UK in 2023](#) | [What people think about their drinking](#) | [Concern and conversations](#) | [Why people drink](#) | [Final reflections](#) | [About Drinkaware](#); [About PS Research](#) | [Appendix](#)

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# Glossary

**Alcohol dependence:** This is a medical definition. Alcohol dependence is defined as behavioural, cognitive and physiological factors that typically include a strong desire to drink alcohol and difficulties in controlling its use. Someone who is alcohol-dependent may persist in drinking, despite harmful physical and mental health consequences.

**AUDIT:** The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a simple, 10-question method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment. It provides a framework for intervention to help hazardous and harmful drinkers to reduce their drinking, or to stop drinking. AUDIT is designed to help health practitioners in particular identify hazardous drinking, harmful drinking and possible dependence. Drinkaware's Alcohol Self-Assessment is based on the AUDIT screening questionnaire.

**AUDIT-C:** This refers to the three consumption-related questions on the AUDIT questionnaire that relate to drinking frequency, units consumed on a typical occasion and frequency of drinking six units or more (for women) or eight units or more (for men) at a single session. 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.

**Binge drinking:** This term has a medical definition. Binge drinking is defined by the NHS for men as drinking more than eight units of alcohol in a single session, and more than six units for women.

**Harmful drinking:** 'Harmful drinking' means drinking in a way that is likely to cause or has already caused harm, i.e. a strong likelihood that damage to health – physical or mental – has already been caused.

**Hazardous drinking:** 'Hazardous drinking' means drinking in a way that may put your mental and/or physical health at serious risk; depending on patterns of drinking and other factors, this can include social consequences.

**Increasing and high risk:** These terms have specific meanings in relation to an AUDIT-C score. 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. Note these scores are indicative as a screening tool and not diagnostic.

# Analysis of 'responsible drinking' open question

The Monitor included the following question: "To the best of your knowledge, when you hear, or see, the term 'responsible drinking', what does that mean to you?". Respondents were given a text box in which to answer and were encouraged to answer in as much detail as possible. Approximately 10% of the 6521 responses were initially analysed to identify common themes and the common words used to describe each theme. All responses were then analysed by searching for the identified words using the Text Filter function within Excel. A full list of the themes, the words used in the Text Filter search and the %s are shown below:

Theme	Words included in text filter search	Number of counts	% of all responses
Limit	Limit	1612	25%
Recommended guidelines	Guidelines/guide/government/gov/recommend	1169	18%
Don't get drunk	Drunk	993	15%
Don't drink drive	Drive/driving	757	12%
Not impacting others	Anyone else/other people/impact on other/others	751	12%
Not in excess	Excess/too much	740	11%
Unit	Unit	723	11%
A couple/a few	one or two/1-2/three/four/3/4/once/twice/one or two/one drink/one glass/a couple of/a few	662	10%
Control	Control/when to stop	626	10%
None of these	-	667	10%
Moderation	Moderation/moderate	491	8%
Occasional/regular	occasional/regular/odd	443	7%
Health	Health	423	6%
Don't blackout/pass out	blackout/don't remember/pass out	409	6%
Not causing harm	harm/danger/risk	363	6%

Theme	Words included in text filter search	Number of counts	% of all responses
Aware	aware	296	5%
Impact	impact/implication	289	4%
Not every day/most days	every day/everyday/most days	265	4%
Binge	Binge	255	4%
Safe	safe	250	4%
Not often/little	not very often/not often/little/small	234	4%
Social	social	210	3%
Behaviour	Behaviour	151	2%
Sensible	sensible/sensibly	136	2%
Problem	problem	118	2%
Too often	Too often	82	1%
Aggressive/fight	fight/argument/violent/aggressive/hurt/harm	78	1%
Alone	alone/on your own/on my own/on my own	57	1%
Hangover	hangover/sick	37	1%