



I used to love my weeknight wine – but then I hired an alcohol coach

It's easy to notch up too many units when drinking, merely out of habit.

Miranda Levy turned to the experts for help cutting down

My drinking isn't a problem – in fact, I rather enjoy it. A cold gavi when I throw myself through the kitchen door on my return from work; a plummy malbec with bolognese on a winter's Sunday night. An alcoholic drink marks the day-to-evening switch after a shift on this newspaper, which can tend to be busy. For me, it's the

equivalent of putting on silky pyjamas when I get home (I do that as well). There's also something of the glamour of "fixing" a cocktail, as Betty Draper did for her husband Don in the television show *Mad Men* – although, from recollection, Betty did, in the end, go a bit too far.

I wish I could be one of those

people who "reward" themselves with a spin class or a healthy glass of kombucha – but I'm not. I like the texture and the taste of a nice glass of wine and, I'll admit it, the transient, fuzzy buzz of this most grown-up method of relaxation.

In mitigation, I rarely have more than two glasses – in fact, it's often just the one – and the

occasional G&T. It's unusual for me to drink past 8.30pm these days. Sometimes I wake up earlier than I need to, but mostly I sleep pretty well; my performance at work isn't affected. I've only been rip-roaring drunk once in the past couple of years; the hangover was hideous and I'm in no hurry to repeat it.

But I can barely remember a night without a drink (apart from a bout of Covid, and the evening of that hangover). Unlike many people who swear they never drink alone, I often do; my partner lives in the US and my children are at university. So, is this a problem?

I'm in my mid-50s. My cardiac risk scores (cholesterol, blood sugar, etc) are creeping up. Even though I eat healthily and exercise regularly, I'm not as skinny as I used to be. I'm aware that alcohol is full of "empty calories".

Like many people, I know that the official NHS advice – for both men and women – is to drink no more than 14 units a week on a regular basis. This was changed in 2016 to be the same for both sexes; it used to be 21 units for men and 14 for women. You are told to spread your drinking evenly over three or more days.

Yet there are still confusing

messages around alcohol. In March this year, Prof Tim Spector of King's College London claimed studies have "consistently shown" that red wine is different to other types of alcohol, going so far as to say it has "magic properties" that are beneficial for the heart. On the other hand, advice from the Chief Medical Officer in 2016 stated clearly that there's "no level of regular drinking that can be considered as completely safe in relation to some cancers", and that "the health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption are an old wives' tale".

Then, earlier this month, a major study published in the journal *Nature Medicine* revealed that drinking any amount of alcohol may raise the risk of 60 diseases. To add to the well-known conditions such as liver disease and cancer, the study claimed there was a greater chance of disorders from lung disease to fractures and even cataracts.

We know who we want to believe about alcohol, but who *should* we believe?

I'm pretty sure I'm bang on the NHS recommendation of 14 units a week. But is this accurate, and even if so, is it too much? In the pursuit of a