

Welcome! Let's Get Started.

If you drink alcohol with any regularity, it is important to consider the fact that like with any substance, the more your body gets used to it being in your system the more likely you are to develop "tolerance."

So, what's "tolerance"? Tolerance is when after a continued pattern of drinking where a person maintains a consistent or constant consumption of alcohol the effects of alcohol are lessened to the point that the person needs to consume more alcohol in order to feel the effects of drinking.

So, when we develop tolerance, we must spend more money on booze and take on the associated physical strain on our bodies that drinking more and more alcohol inevitably puts on us.

Taking A (Alcohol)-Break can save you some coin, give your body a chance to reset, and help you reflect on how you find a healthy balance in any future choice to drink.

This guide's intention is to help provide a structure to follow and offer some support to those looking to just take A-Break, or to move toward a more moderate pattern of drinking or perhaps even start on the path toward not drinking at all.

Making changes is not an easy thing to do and alcohol use sometimes can fulfill very specific needs in a person's life. Taking out the functional ways in which drinking supports you can be difficult without considering how to keep those needs being met through new behaviors or outlets.

Just like anything else, alcohol has its pros and...it also can have its cons. Taking a step back from drinking can often give us the perspective we need to evaluate both the pros and the cons of drinking more objectively. With that new perspective, you'll be armed with self-awareness when you return to drinking to better ensure you are finding a healthy balance for yourself.

Additionally, this resource guides you through some potentially tough topics so please **do not hesitate** to reach out for support from the Counseling and Wellness Center or staff and peers within your support system if you find yourself struggling along the way.

A final disclaimer, going "cold turkey" (stopping altogether) from drinking, particularly if you are drinking in large amounts and/or regularly can be extremely dangerous, even life-threatening! Please use the self-screening tool on the next page and if you score a 5 or higher consult with your health provider and or a clinician at the CWC before suspending your drinking.

I hope you find this resource helpful and if you don't find it helpful, I would welcome your feedback

Much Respect,

-Will Kraman

Wkraman@norwich.edu

Patient name:	
Date of birth:	

Alcohol screening questionnaire (AUDIT)
Drinking alcohol can affect your health and some medications you may take. Please help us provide you with the best medical care by answering the questions below.

One drink equals:







liquor (one shot)

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How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	Never	Monthly or less	2 - 4 times a month	2 - 3 times a week	4 or more times a week
How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?	0-2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7-9	10 or more
How often do you have five or more drinks on one occasion?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
5. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
6. How often during the last year have you needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
7. How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
8. How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because of your drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
Have you or someone else been injured because of your drinking?	No		Yes, but not in the last year		Yes, in the last year
10. Has a relative, friend, doctor, or other health care worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?	No	I	Yes, but not in the last year		Yes, in the last year
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Have you ever been in treatment for an alcohol problem? Onever Ocurrently In the part
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#### How to Use this Guide

The guide is broken down into days so that you can have some specific guidance in preparing for and moving through "A-Break" from drinking.

Each week will provide you with some thematic perspective to keep in mind as you go through your own journey with "A-Break". Below is a break-down of what the themes of each week revolve around. So, while there has been a lot of thought put into the order and content of the days and weeks and being sure they build on each other, feel free to move around the guide and use the resources as you may feel you need them.

You know what you need! Trust yourself to use the guidance as you need it!

Week 1- Physical

Week 2- Social

Week 3- Emotional

Week 4- Values

## **Day 0- Preparation and Withdrawal**

Step 1- Pick a time to start. It may never feel like the "right time" to take A-Break. However, setting a limit and seeing how you respond to that limit can be a great way to get an early read on how well-balanced your relationship to drinking is. If you set a limit but push it off, make excuses as to why it's not a good time to start, or just simply procrastinate around the decision to start that's good information to have.

If you find you are having any of these challenges to start the process, be curious and ask yourself, "What is behind my reluctance to start?". You may find there are a host of benefits or rituals and routines that are wrapped up in your pattern of drinking that could be hard to let go of. Understanding what stands in the way of starting and how to move around that obstacle is often the first step everyone must take.

Step 2- Once you've got a date picked out to start, it's important to remove temptations. If you have booze stashed in your room, it's best to remove it from where you can access it. If you are planning to stop drinking all together just get rid of it or if you are just taking a tolerance break and/or a reflective break from drinking perhaps ask a friend to hold onto it for you.

Step 3- Letting people know that you are taking A-Break can be helpful to do so that you can get out ahead of the questions that likely will come from making this choice for yourself, like "Why are you not drinking?" or "Are you going sober?"... Knowing how to respond to these questions and providing the rationale for your choice will in most cases provide you with support from others, heck you might even get a few people to join you on the journey.

This will also allow you to assess which people are in your corner and will support you as you take "A-Break" and which ones might make the choice harder and may even try to convince you to step back into the fold of drinking.

When making the choice to step back from drinking you may find there are some people you have to take a step back from as well.

Physical withdrawal can be a thing. If you have made alcohol a habit that reflects a pattern of heavy and prolonged drinking you may experience withdrawal symptoms like insomnia, hand tremors, nausea and vomiting, anxiety and general feelings of agitation in your body. At the worst, there can be seizures or even hallucinations.

What's important to remember is that you first consult with a primary care doctor and/or a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor to discuss your recent pattern of drinking before you stop drinking and to determine the safest way to detox.

Withdrawal symptoms most often peak during the second day of abstinence and usually improve drastically by days 4 and 5. However, setting good habits of physical self-care will be essential as less acute withdrawal symptoms can linger beyond that timeframe.

#### Day 1 – Water

The cold hard truth is that alcohol puts strain on the body and it's a diuretic, so it naturally causes you to lose an increased amount of water in your body. Dehydration is a common part of why people feel lousy and/or fatigued after a hard night of drinking.

Staying hydrated also helps us flush toxins out of our bodies so that when we are taking A-Break we can use it as an opportunity to flush the system of unwanted toxins. Obviously, hydration is important for our overall health, impacting all sorts of functions, including digestion, body temperature regulation, joint health, skin health, mood and so much more.

Even after one day of staying hydrated, you can start feeling the effects!

Set a goal for staying hydrated daily. Get a water bottle that comes with you everywhere and learn how to pace your efforts toward optimum hydration through the day, especially if you aren't use to drinking water regularly, you will piss ... a lot.

In general, you should try and drink between half an ounce and an ounce of water for each pound that you weigh. So, for example, if you weigh 150 lbs., that would be 75 ounces (about 2.22 L) to 150 ounces (about 4.44 L) of water a day.

If drinking that much water seems like a task, you can try to flavor the water with some citrus flavoring like lemons or limes which can make it more refreshing and easier to drink.

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## Day 2- Sleep

A lot of people express that drinking helps them relax and fall asleep. This is true in a way because alcohol is a sedative and leads to a sense of drowsiness that will help you doze off more easily.

However, when we drink, it interrupts our sleep cycle. Even one drink can interfere with a quality night's rest. A full night of drinking causes your body to be focused on processing the alcohol in your body as you sleep, which can lead to tossing and turning and a lack of restorative and restful sleep.

Setting up a routine and consistent sleep schedule is a fantastic way to help your overall mood, energy level and boost your immune system. "Sleep Hygiene" is a thing. It dictates that we use our bed for three things and three things only. Sleep, Sex and Sickness.

Bed often becomes the place we binge-watch the "Great British Baking Show" (just a me problem?), or to write that term paper, or to use as a couch or table. When we limit it's uses to the three S's we designate that space for those purposes and create strong associations in our mind.

Speaking of conditioning our minds, when you set a regular time to go to bed and stick with it, your body begins to adapt and you will start feeling tired around the time you are getting ready for bed, decreasing the amount of time it takes to get to sleep. If you are going to be in front of a screen before bed, use a blue light filter (blue light is a stimulant and makes our brains very active) and if you can turn off devices at least 30 minutes before you go to sleep, that helps too!

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## Day 3: Food

One of the many reasons people take a break from alcohol is to give their bodies a chance to recover and to cleanse or detox their system. What you put into your body matters especially when seeking this kind of outcome from taking a break from alcohol.

Hydration, as we have already covered, helps but it is also important to have a diet that is well-balanced in proteins, vitamins, and complex carbohydrates to help detoxify the body. Think lean red meats, chicken, fish, eggs, and turkey when making choices about healthy proteins to have as a regular part of your diet. These proteins can help restore the liver, repair tissue, and stabilize a person's blood sugar. Complex carbohydrates like beans, peas, legumes, bread, and pasta take longer to digest and provide energy for a longer period of time, whereas alcohol is quickly broken down as sugars. When considering which kind of vitamins to take when detoxing your system, vitamin B has been shown as an imperative component of detox with specific vitamins like B3 and B5 assisting specifically from alcohol detox.

Foods to avoid are junk food and snacks that are heavy in sugar. Yet these also tend to be the "comfort foods" you may crave once you decide to take A-Break from alcohol. Treating yourself to something isn't bad in moderation, what you are looking to avoid is the tendency to binge on what feels comforting in the moment, but you'll regret later.

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#### **Day 4: Exercise**

Alcohol use puts stress on our bodies in the form of weight gain, cardiovascular issues and liver damage. Regular exercise can help combat some of these negative effects while also helping the body detox. Taking A-Break, especially if alcohol use has been used in the past to combat stress, can be...you guessed it...STRESSFUL. Exercise has been known to help with stress by releasing endorphins which are natural mood elevators. Exercise also will pair well with your desire to get good sleep during this break because if the body is tired from a good workout you will get to sleep faster and enjoy deeper sleep than if you were stagnant and not moving your body all day. Finally, when devoting yourself to exercise, we are more likely to surround ourselves with other people who are similarly trying to engage in healthy habits and as you will see, having a supportive social network is key to making the most of this break.

So, think about setting up a regular and consistent routine for exercise that aligns with how often you were exercising before taking A-Break. If you were only exercising once a week before, jumping up to 6 days a week of intense exercise is not going to be sustainable, and you'll likely hurt yourself in the process. So, pace yourself and set realistic and measured goals for how often and how hard you exercise.

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## **Day 5: Managing Cravings**

Cravings, whether physical or psychological, are part of the process of stepping away from any habit that has been conditioned and formed over a long period of time. We can best manage these experiences by focusing on the following:

- **Recognize and Accept Cravings:** It's part of the journey so you might as well get on board. Remind yourself that each craving period is temporary and will pass with time. So, give yourself time to ride that wave out.
- **Avoid Triggers:** Identifying what these possible triggers might be. Think of the people, places and things that might prompt a craving. Like Friday...as the old adage says "you know what rhymes with beer...Friday!"
- **Stay Busy:** Keep a full calendar and engage in activities you enjoy that don't involve alcohol. Boredom is a bear to well...bare. So, make a plan to stay active.
- **Use Distraction techniques:** Remember it won't last forever so find some healthy distractions that will capture your attention and focus.
- **Positive Self-Talk:** Our internal thoughts in moments of feeling an urge or craving are going to sound like "it's ok, what's one drink while watching the football game." (Rationalizing) or "man... it would be nice to just relax with a cold one" (Nostalgia). Be prepared with some positive affirmations that keep you on the path like, "I've got this. It's hard for a reason and hard is worth it!"
- **Set up Goals and Rewards:** Set up goals for the journey ahead and reward each milestone with something you'll enjoy. Positive reinforcement is so much better a motivator than negative reinforcement ever will be or was.
- Exercise, Eat and Sleep regularly: Like we already covered.
- Have an accountability buddy: Plan to call someone you trust if you feel
  yourself slipping and make sure they are on board to keep you accountable for
  your break.

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## **Day 6: Mind Body Connection**

When we are taking A-Break we are taking intentional steps to give our body a rest and have the chance to recover. But the body may be use to or even dependent on the regular presence of alcohol in your system. If you have developed a physical dependence on alcohol by around day 3 or 4 you may have noticed a few things happening within your body. Tremors or shaky hands, excessive sweating, nausea and poor appetite, restlessness in body and insomnia. These first few days of focus on your journey through A-Break have been aimed at giving the body what it needs to detox the system of alcohol. But there is more to helping the body then just treating it right with, food, sleep and exercise. The "Mind Body Connection" is one of our most powerful assets to leverage to help the body relax by focusing on mental exercises that let the mind settle. Relax the mind and the body will follow.

Places to start may be yoga...shameless plug the CWC offers free yoga classes every Wednesday in the library at 12pm! Stop by and get information and begin the process of strengthening that mind body connection through some good old stretching!

Mindfulness is a thing...it's a buzz word for sure...but with excellent reason. Mindfulness practices can help us become more aware of our triggers and urges while staying present in the moment. If you don't have a regular outlet for mindfulness, check on these apps which are easy to use and will guide you through the process. Insight Timer, Balance Meditation App and Headspace.







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## Day 7: Celebrate

One week in the books! You have accomplished the first and most important step... *committing*! And for a lot of people that first step is the hardest part.

That's not to say that it will be completely easy from now on or that you weren't tempted or perhaps you even slipped up.

But you now have a week of experience and self-reflection under your belt which will arm you with the knowledge you need to best inform your choices going forward for the rest of this tolerance break. What helped? What made it harder than it needed to be? What influenced your slip-up if you had one?

Be CURIOUS!...Not judgmental.

A way to celebrate this commitment is to look at how much money you saved this week by not buying alcohol and spend that money on something else that you will enjoy! Remember the power of positive reinforcement can't be underestimated. Use it as a tool that strengthens your desire to stick to the process.

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## **Day 8: Social Benefits and Drawbacks**

The reality is that an often important reason we make the choice to drink is because it socially supports us in having the means to connect with our peers. Whether this be because it is the social norm and it helps us feel like we belong, or perhaps drinking alcohol reduces the chances you will feel socially anxious or awkward, or maybe it provides you that "liquid courage" to drop some of your inhibitions that might normally prevent you from being social and putting yourself out there. Or perhaps it is just fun times that are enjoyed with people you value.

These social reinforcements or "social lubricants" that make connections easier can't be ignored, having social connections is an essential human need.

And just like any behavior, there is often another side to the coin. Drinking can have its social drawbacks too. You may find your inhibitions lowered so much that you do things without really referencing your moral compass and the next day you are reminded of it on Instagram. You may find drinking makes you more prone to social conflicts, especially if you are typically more conflict-averse when you are sober. You get some drinks in you and suddenly those built-up resentments can come forward strongly. Maybe your pattern of drinking has friends worried about you and hearing them express that concern is jarring or lights up those defensive feelings.

Self-reflection about these benefits and drawbacks can give you good information that might help you better know what kind of relationship you want to have with alcohol after this break and help you identify if you need some of those social benefits addressed through some newly learned behaviors. Check out the decisional balance exercise on the next page!

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## Day 9: Boredom

So, another reason I hear spoken about why people choose to drink here at Norwich is because "what else is there to do?!" in Northfield VT. The sense of isolation that people may experience if they don't have a way to get off campus or how limiting the winter months can feel because "it's too cold to do anything", can create an increased likelihood of drinking to relieve boredom.

I get it. I grew up in New York City, "the city that never sleeps" and spent my collegiate years in Burlington VT, which was a total culture shock. And I'm sure some of you are saying "hey Burlington as a sleepy town is nowhere close to comparing Northfield VT". And you wouldn't be wrong. Again, I submit.

However, this is where I will challenge you. When we decide to drink in order to make "boring" more interesting and we act at times as if the situation has changed when in reality "boring" hasn't changed, you're just intoxicated.

Drinking is often like the "easy button" from Staples. You know, like the commercials. It's a quick fix for boredom and doesn't stimulate us to think flexibly, creatively, or from a problem-solving perspective about how to address our boredom.

When we use drinking repetitively as a cure for boredom, we rob ourselves of the skill to learn how to operate in the mundane and it will make us less tolerant of the regular routines of life. After this break you may return to drinking, if you do, consider steering away from using drinking as your boredom "easy button".

As a challenge, perhaps use this journal prompt to think of making a list of creative ways to relieve boredom that does not include drinking.

Journal:		

## **Day 10: Belonging and Loneliness**

When we come to college, we are starting over in so many ways. It is a new beginning that asks us to simultaneously navigate the challenge of taking on academics, living independently from our family, and picking a chosen path through life, all while having to make new friendships and connections. No simple task.

Under the pressure of these developmental tasks of maturing into our young adult selves, we may be susceptible to falling into the social norms and social cultures of drinking that exist here on campus. The desire to belong to the communities we reside in is STRONG, basically baked into our DNA.

We are social creatures. So, back in the day when we were nomadic tribes of people roaming the earth the worst thing that could have happened to us was to be kicked out of the tribe. Survival would be hard on your own if not impossible. So, if the social norm is to grind all week and then cut loose on Friday and Saturday (and sometimes Sunday or Monday when there is football or even Thursday when there is football) and drink, then the chances we adopt those patterns are high because if we don't then we ask ourselves, "are we really in the tribe if we don't?". Which isn't a comfortable place to be.

When you committed to taking A-Break, you may have noticed that suddenly friends (or people you saw as friends) didn't want to hang out any longer, or the task of hanging out with your friends while they drank and you didn't, became hard to bear. If a lot of your previous social interactions revolved around drinking, then once you stop those social opportunities may stop as well.

Our relationships should matter to us. And they are healthiest when we are accepted as we are and choose to be. If you've chosen to take A-Break that shouldn't be the make or breaking point of relationships in your life. If anything, it should help you build deeper connections because you'll know that the people who stick with you through A-Break care about YOU! Additionally, as an antidote for loneliness, you may be able to get some of your friends to take A-Break as a group!

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## **Day 11: Social Anxiety**

So, one of the common stories I've heard repeatedly over the years of doing this work with people, is that alcohol "helps me loosen up" in social settings. The common use of alcohol as a "social lubricant" is widely known as a strategy to deal with social anxiety. Now we will go into our emotional landscape further in week 3 but there will be a bit of overlap as our social and emotional landscapes often are tied at the hip to one another.

The social lubricant effect can also be connected to the idea that alcohol "gives" people courage to face social situations they would otherwise find anxiety provoking. Hey, that's why it's been dubbed "liquid courage" after all right?

There is no doubt that alcohol has an impact on our brains and our bodies. And since it acts as a sedative, we will experience a sense of relaxation in our body which can help us reduce our inhibitions and raise of confidence as we trick our body and brain into feeling relaxed enough to not be anxious.

The challenge we face when drinking is that these effects are short lived and as we become more intoxicated by trying to chase that relaxed feeling, we can create a scenario where we develop a "false sense of confidence" and so what may seem like a good idea in the moment, like "emailing your professor about how you REALLY feel about that C they gave you" or "writing a haiku about your ex's shortcomings and texting it to their mother", turns out to not be the best idea.

The next day regrets after drinking are a thing. We must live with the choices we made the night before when we were drinking. Developing the awareness to find more diverse and effective ways to combat social anxiety is critical. That way, you don't become dependent on alcohol to cope and then live with the consequences of misguided choices.

Take some time to reflect on how social anxiety potentially impacts your choice to drink and what consequences you have potentially had to deal with the next morning as a result.

Journal:	 	 	

## **Day 12: Social Conditioning**

Let me introduce the concept of social conditioning. We are social creatures, and we can get to a place where we are simply acting from a place of habit without really being thoughtful about our choices. In essence, we do what we do because that's what we always do.

So how does this relate to the choice to drink, particularly here at Norwich? As we talked about on Day 10, there are some conditions here at Norwich which might normalize the choice to drink, especially on Fridays and Saturdays.

So much so that it just becomes the "social norm," it is what "everyone" is seemingly doing. When the social environment so strongly guides the perspectives of what is expected we may find ourselves automatically going to drinking without even thinking about it. It has simply become the routine.

Imbedded throughout this process of taking A-Break, we are trying to strengthen your capacity to make mindful and informed choices. If drinking has just become a habit and one you don't even think about, this is a chance to step back and consider how to make informed choices and account for the individual context of your own personal experience. Some Fridays or Saturdays might not be the best time to drink for a host of reasons and you want to be sure your choice to drink accounts for those reasons and isn't over hijacked by the social conditioned impulses we develop.

Take a moment to journal about your own experience with the choice to drink when you do decide to drink. Is it a mindful process? Are you going along with it because the environment expects it of you? Take the time to really reflect!

Journal:		

## Day 13: Social Situations that Activate Risk

As we have looked at already on Day 8 there are two sides of the coin when we consider our drinking. There are social benefits and there are often social drawbacks or risks. Drinking will lower our inhibitions and cloud our ability to make rational decisions. It's important to take a moment to consider what are the social situations that may create the most risk for you.

For some people, those situations might be big parties, gatherings with a lot of people you don't know, going to the bar to drink. It might also be situations where there is a specific kind of drinking that is happening. Drinking that involves more hard liquor or mixed drinks where you don't know how much alcohol you consume. The hard reality is that the choice to drink in certain settings do at times expose us to a higher degree of risk. Examples are getting "roofied" and finding yourself in a situation where you can protect yourself or give consent. \*

These are just some examples to get your mind thinking about the potentially riskier social situations you navigate when you choose to drink and not an exhaustive list. Take the time in the journal section below to reflect on your own individual risk profile.

Additionally, it would be important to think about the situations when the choice to drink is relatively safer, where you are less prone to drink in excess or to not feel the pressure to drink more than you would feel comfortable. Making note of both sides of the coin will allow you to understand how to better mitigate your risk if and when you choose to drink again.

(\* If you have found yourself in the position where you were drugged or taken advantage of when drinking please know there are resources available to you on campus here at the CWC and through the Title 9 office.)

Journal:	 

#### **Day 14: HALF WAY!!!**

Two weeks down and two to go! Let's get it!

If you have successfully been able to stay sober for these last two weeks take a moment to consider what choices you have made that have helped you accomplish that feat. Your success isn't happening by accident or by dumb luck, you are likely contributing to your success by making some thoughtful choices and really taking the moment to reflect and learn.

If you have had some slip ups along the way, remember to stay CURIOUS, **NOT JUDEGEMENTAL!** Notice what surrounded the situations when you decided to drink. Be a detective, really look over the situations with a microscope and understand that there are physical, social, and emotional conditions that guide our behaviors.

Thus far we have looked at the physical impacts and social situations that intersect with drinking and in the next section we will break down how our emotions play into our choice to drink.

Take a moment to journal about what your experience thus far has been like. Has it been a walk in the park, or has it been a greater challenge than you expected it to be? Has the process opened your eyes to how you relate to alcohol and given you some objective perspective you haven't had before?

Journal:	

#### Day 15: Brain Science, Alcohol and Emotions

The brain is the hub from which our emotional experience originates from. So, how does how brain interact with alcohol and how does that impact our emotions? Our prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for all our executive functioning, like our decision making, or impulse control and our capacity to regulate our emotions. So, what part of the brain ability to function is most compromised when we choose to drink? You guessed it, the prefrontal cortex.

This is why we hear so many tragic stories of poor decision making or have experienced those regretful mornings after realizing what you did the night before after drinking too much. Alcohol lowers our inhibitions, which makes us less rationally grounded and more prone to act on emotional impulses without considering the consequences. And with our decision making impaired we are more likely to misinterpret social cues or overreact to situations in ways we will later regret.

Alright on to some brain chemistry. When we drink there is a spike of dopamine and serotonin which results in an initial lift in our mood and a general sense of euphoria. Additionally, alcohol use enhances the activity of Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid or also known as GABA, which is a neurotransmitter that "blunts" or inhibits us which contributes to feeling more "relaxed" and even can lower anxiety. Good news, right?

Yes, of course, there can be some benefits...initially....with drinking. However, there is quickly a diminishing of returns. Once that dopamine dump wears off and those levels drop we are then more prone to lean into feelings of sadness and irritability, particularly if this is how we were feeling before we started drinking (more on this later). Additionally, with chronic alcohol use we can deplete serotonin production which can lead to having a higher likelihood to experience mood swings and emotional regulations issues.

Take a moment to consider your mood and how you have tracked how it interacts with alcohol in the past and write down what comes to mind.

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## Day 16: Set and Setting

Let's talk through this concept called "set and setting". "Set" refers to an individual's mindset, their psychological state and emotional condition in the moment. This also includes our thoughts, feelings and intentions related to drinking. "Setting" refers to the physical and social environment in which drinking is taking place. Since we have already talked about social environments and how those influence the choice to drink we are going to particularly focus on the "set" portion of the equation.

Our mindset going into drinking matters. Ever hear someone name their intentions around drinking in advance of drinking? Example..."Tonight I'm getting blackout!!". We can take some safe guesses around what this person's intentions are around drinking for the evening. Our emotion starting point prior to drinking also matters. If we are feeling down or sad before we start drinking, the initial impacts of drinking might make us feel better (as discussed above) however once those initial effects wear off, alcohol is a depressant, so you can guess where that goes. More drinking will just feed into those sad feelings and the initial effects might convince us to drink more to ensure we keep those sad feelings at bay. Which typically leads to a risky pattern of drinking or "binge drinking".

Take a moment to journal about your experience with "set and setting" prior to and during drinking and how that shapes your experience historically when you have chosen to drink.

Journal:		

## **Day 17: Emotional Numbing**

As you take stock of your relationship with alcohol it is important to honestly reflect and consider whether or not you have a tendency to drink to avoid or distance yourself from what you are feeling.

If this sounds familiar, it may be beneficial to consider which feeling states cause you to engage in this pattern of numbing or distancing yourself through alcohol. While getting some distance from feelings that bother us or cause us distress is a natural instinct, the truth is that the scenarios or situations that have activated these feelings rarely go away after a night of drinking. Those same feelings and situations are just waiting for us when we sober up. In fact, our avoidance of the feelings might have made matters worse!

Taking this time to reflect and take "A-Break" will give you the insight into knowing which feeling states create risk for you and make the informed choice to learn new ways to cope with those feelings more actively.

Consider what are the emotions that tend to cause you distress. How is the choice to drink ever linked to these feelings? How does drinking help? And how does drinking potentially harm or make matters worse?

Journal:	

## Day 18: Depression + Alcohol

As we have already discussed earlier, the initial impacts of alcohol use can give us a positive bump in our mood. Also, alcohol and the sense of detachment it gives us from problems we face in life might allow us to put the context around low mood, out of sight, and out of mind for a while.

This temporary relief from feeling down can feel really good and our brains are designed to pay attention to what feels good. We are wired for reward. If we are feeling bad and then do something that makes us feel better, even temporarily, then that behavior will be reinforced.

So, what happens when we continue to drink with regularity over time to get some relief from our depressed mood? Or even just drinking regularly regardless of its aim. Like with any substance we put in our bodies, the more we use it the more our bodies get used to it and develop a tolerance for its effects. Over time as our tolerance increases the amount of alcohol you will need to consume to get that sense of initial relief will increase and increase. Which in turn makes you more dependent on alcohol and more exposed to the physical stress and strain the increased amount of alcohol you consume puts on your body.

Take a moment to consider your relationship with depressed mood and how that intersects with alcohol. Consider whether you have noticed your body becoming more tolerant to alcohol and over how much time that has changed.

Disclaimer!!! Taking "A-Break" will lower your tolerance so that if and when you

choose to drink again you will need less alcohol to feel its effects!

Journal:

## Day 19: Anxiety + Alcohol

As we discussed throughout this resource, alcohol can provide relief when confronted with difficult feelings. It's a depressant so when consuming it, you will feel the initial sensation of relaxation as the central nervous system is calmed down. However, there is also the "rebound anxiety" that follows a night of drinking where the calming effect of alcohol wears off and your body works to rebalance neurotransmitter levels that were altered by alcohol. Combine the body's recalibrating back to the present moment and the possibility of having made choices the night before that you might later regret and you and "Hang-xiety."

"Hang-xiety" is the extremely uncomfortable moment the morning after drinking in the midst of a hangover and you can't remember the night beyond a certain point. You pick up your phone, you check your text messages, and maybe you anxiously reach out to a friend who was with you to see if you can fill in the blanks from the night before. If you're lucky with no bad choices, you dodged the bullet. If you are unlucky, there are 30 text messages sent to your ex you promised yourself to stay away from.

Take a moment to consider how alcohol and anxiety mix for you and what changes if any you need to make to have a healthier balance.		
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## Day 20: Alcohol and Other Drugs

If there is one message, I want to make very clear in this section is that when alcohol is combined with another drug there can be a variety of risk factors and you need to be informed before you drink when taking prescription psychiatric or over-the-counter medications. Additionally, when taking nonprescribed medication or elicit drugs you want to know how those mix with alcohol and what the risks are. So, talk to your prescribing doctor to know the risks and do your research!

Some examples of how alcohol mixes with medications are as follows:

Antidepressants, antipsychotics, benzodiazepines, and antihistamines can lead to extreme drowsiness, impaired coordination, and the increased risk of accidents

Acetaminophen and some psychiatric medications mixed with alcohol can lead to liver toxicity or liver damage.

Antidepressants have been shown to be less effective which can make it harder to manage the symptoms of depression and anxiety they might be aiming to target.

Antianxiety Medications and Benzodiazepines (Xanax and Valium) when combined with alcohol can depress the central nervous system to dangerous levels leading to slowed breathing, loss of consciousness, or even overdose.

Research has also shown that when alcohol is mixed with medications like antidepressants or antipsychotics it can increase the risk of suicidal thoughts or actions particularly if that person is already vulnerable to that kind of thought or action.

Please understand that this isn't an exhaustive list of the potential risk factors and the best way to know is to ask a prescribing medical professional, or clinician and to do the research to be informed. Don't just assume that it will be fine.

Take some time to consider if you have all the information you need to make thought

informed!			

# Day 21: Regret and/or Shame

In the various sections we have talked about the impact alcohol use can have on poor decision-making or impulsive behaviors which of course can impact our emotional landscape. One of the more common emotional responses to having made some rash or impulsive choices is regret. Now regret, like all emotions, doesn't need to get a bad rap. When we feel regret, it can sometimes spur us forward to addressing the behaviors we engaged in that we would like to change. To regret means you have got some values that you got away from and you feel badly about the way you behaved. This doesn't feel good but it also means you are a conscientious person.

As for shame, shame is more difficult to work with than just simple regret. Shame has all of the characteristics of regret with a vicious twist. Shame means you feel bad for how you showed up and behaved **and** you believe yourself to be a "bad person" because of that behavior. Shame erodes our identity and positive self-concept of ourselves and alcohol use when not done mindfully has the potential to activate shame in all of us.

Take a moment to journal about how or if regret or shame has shown up for you in

relation to your alcohol use. Consider how to leverage regret to get realigned with your values and how you want to show up in the world. If shame is part of your story, consider ways to address it in a way that works for you and if you are stumpedyou guessed it ASK FOR HELP!!			

## Day 22: Trauma and Alcohol

So as a warning, this section deals with some heavy topics, and if traumatic experiences are a part of your story and you don't feel ready or equipped to manage the feelings that may come up when doing this self-reflection, then feel free to skip over this section and do what you need to in order to take care of yourself. The general message meant to be captured here is that alcohol misuse or dependency has been shown repeatedly to have ties back to past painful experiences, with alcohol serving as a way people cope with the emotions, reminders, and thoughts related to those experiences.

Trauma, whether a single incident or event or more complex trauma (recurrent or multiple, layered events) has a significant impact on a person's capacity to regulate their emotions and has been shown to cause people to have their central nervous system on overdrive as it tries to predict, prepare and protect people from further or future harm. This constant hypervigilance is exhausting for the mind and the body to go through and alcohol with its sedative qualities can provide people some temporary relief from this anxious state of being. This temporary relief tends to feel so good at the moment that people with trauma in their history crave to get back to that more relaxed, distracted, or emotionally blunted state. As further use and reliance on this means of coping becomes habitual, the body builds up a tolerance for the sedative effects of alcohol, which then in turn causes the person to need **more** alcohol to get the relief they seek. And thus, addiction is born with those who suffer from the emotional fallout of trauma.

Below is a web address or link to a YouTube video that explains the link between trauma and addiction in the most clear and compassionate way I know. I invite you to explore it if you feel up to the task or have further curiosity about how to understand this dynamic. Watch the video and write down your reflections.

The Past Explanation of Addiction Pye Ever Heard Dr. Cabor Moté

https://youtu.be/ys6TCO_olOc				
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## **Day 23: Another Milestone Moment!**

Congratulations! You are three-quarters of the way through of month of sampling sobriety if you have stayed the course. By now you have fully embraced the choice not to drink. Pay attention to how that feels! What differences do you notice in your experience? These could be positive differences, like feeling more energized, sleeping better, less conflict in relationships, better grades because you have less brain fog, and many more positive side effects to taking a break. However, there may also be some negative outcomes, like feeling more bored, being less social because you don't want to hang around people who are choosing to drink, or perhaps difficult feelings have crept forward now that you have chosen not to use alcohol as that means to emotionally numb. Whatever you notice, pay attention to both the benefits and drawbacks and consider in the section how to celebrate those new benefits while assessing how to address those negative side effects that sometimes come with making a change.

If you had some slip-ups or if you've chosen to drink at some point up to this point, no

judgment. Making commitments to changing your behaviors is hard work and we are conditioned to act on what feels familiar. Breaking habits is plain hard work. So no judgments from me and no judgments from YOU! You have held space to explore this in some capacity. There is value in not nailing it. In fact, failure is a better teacher 10 out of 10 times if we treat ourselves well enough to learn from our choices. So take a moment and consider what led to the choice to drink, review the sections you have already covered, and be curious about what new insights might be there for you to learn from.

## Day 24: Family of Origin and Alcohol

When we try to understand how we show up in the world and what informs the choices we make one of the best ways we can build insight is to look back to where we have been and where we have come from. Our family of origin, which can be our biological family or even our adopted family, certainly plays a role in shaping us. As this relates to alcohol use it is important to note that while there have been efforts to isolate specific gene markers that are commonly associated with addiction, so that we can quite literally draw a line between the genes your biological parents pass down to you and addiction, this research is still being explored and we can't rely on genetics alone to guide our understanding of the risk of addiction.

What we do know in the behavioral health field is that "social conditioning" does influence our behaviors. So, if we grew up in a household where drinking regularly was a normal part of life the likelihood of us also drinking with some regularity is higher. Then the conditioned habit of drinking regularly does impact your brain and its "reward system" which gets use to alcohol as a pleasurable experience which only further solidifies our behaviors, especially if there are at first minimal or no negative consequences from drinking.

This is why it is important to reflect on our family history and determine what we

witnessed as it relates to alcohol use within our family system. Take a moment and ask

ourself, "How did what I witnessed within my family shape my own relationship with lcohol?" and determine "how many direct relatives and important people in my life				
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have or do identify the				
drinkers?". This insig	ht will help you l	better understan	d and evaluate you	own potential
risk of developing an	unhealthy relation	onship with alcol	hol.	
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## Day 25: Career and Alcohol

By this point, I hope you have started to better understand how and why you specifically choose to drink. This insight is important because it will help you mitigate your risk in the present and future. Whether you are a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior there may be some part of you that looks to the future and considers the question "What career am I seeking beyond college?". For some of you this may be a very clear and secure answer, "I'm going into the armed forces" or "I'm going to be a police officer" or "I'm going to be an architect or a nurse". And for some of you, you may not be sure. That's ok too.

Either way we want to be able to look to the future and determine how my current drinking style and habits align with my preferred future and what about the career I am choosing to pursue potentially creates risk for me in developing unhealthy habits with alcohol use.

For example, if you have learned that you have developed a habit of drinking when you are feeling stressed and just need to unwind. Your habits of drinking have steadily increased in amount and frequency over time. You plan to go into the line of duty as a police officer. This is a job that can be very stressful at times. There may even be some common ground you might find with other colleagues who seek to de-stress in the same way that you do.

In this scenario there are ample warning signs to consider and making a plan for how your choice to drink adapts to the future and how to diversify your means of being able to cope with stress is paramount.

Take some time to consider your preferred future and what kind of relationship with alcohol is most compatible for you.			

# Day 26: Future Family/Extended Family Relationships

We have already talked about how our family of origin can influence our relationship with alcohol. In this section, we want to support the process of reflecting on how our relationship with alcohol influences our relationships with family and our goals for the future in regard to family.

For some of us, we have a very small nuclear family structure and for others, we have a sprawling collection of siblings, cousins, nephews and nieces, or anything in between. Regardless of your family structure is it inevitable that we influence one another. In some cases, we witness and experience these relationships being either enhanced by alcohol use or perhaps even strained by alcohol use. Additionally, we need to take time to reflect on what kind of role do we play in our family members lives. For some of you, you may be a kind of a role model for a niece nephew, cousin, or even for a younger sibling. Consider if this is the case what are you modeling for them with how you choose to drink? What kind of messages, either spoken or unspoken, are being absorbed? Are these messages giving these loved ones the best chance to develop a healthy relationship with alcohol either now or in the future?

Additionally, as we grow and mature the idea of starting a family of our own may become part of our preferred future. If this is the case, taking the time to consider what you want to model in your relationship with a partner or for your children, as it relates to alcohol is important, because as we know we can't help but influence the relationships around us, so then how do we do this thoughtfully? Take the time to consider your current family relationships and how they intersect with alcohol use. If you have a partner you are looking to take these next steps in developing a family of your own and have an open conversation about how alcohol fits into that future. Use the space below to reflect on what you considered for yourself.

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# Day 27: Financial Goals and Alcohol

It comes as no surprise that the habit of drinking costs money. And depending on how, how much and where you choose to drink the financial impact changes. For example, If your chosen path to drinking is out at the bars, bar tabs tend to be higher than what you might spend at the store.

So, as an exercise, I want you to look at your most recent pattern of drinking in a given week. How much did you choose to drink and how much money did you spend on alcohol? Now expand that to how much you spent on alcohol in a month and then expand that out to a year. What was the number? What are your thoughts about that number? What might you have been able to use that money towards if it hadn't been spent on alcohol? How much money have you saved so far in this sampling of sobriety over the past few weeks?

We all want financial stability. It is undoubtedly a factor in creating a stable foundation

for our lives. Being thoughtful about our spending helps us create habits that serve us as we strive toward independence. If you choose to return to drinking after this break, take a moment to consider how you may shift your pattern of drinking to best serve your financial needs. And if you want, maybe even consider what you may want to invest in now that you have saved some money!			

# Day 28: Spirituality/Faith and Alcohol

For many of us, we have an established orientation to spirituality and/or faith. Embedded in those orientations is often a set of guiding principles or values that we try to emulate. These guiding principles and values can often times be a protective factor for people, as it gives them a moral compass to follow. The belief in a power higher than ourselves can at times give us the perspective we need to embrace hard choices in our lives, like making changes in our relationship with alcohol. Conversely, sometimes we struggle to meet the expectations of our faith or spirituality because of our relationship to alcohol, which can lead us down a path of guilt, regret or maybe even shame.

If you do subscribe to a faith-based orientation or actively practice a spiritual routine or practice consider in the section below, whether or not the choice to drink brings you more closely aligned with these guiding principles and values or further misaligned with them.

If you do not have a faith-based orientation or spiritual framework in which you see the world through, consider in the section below what guides this choice and how or if it relates at all to your choice to drink.			

## Day 29: Our Values and Alcohol

In the section prior to this one we explored one potential domain in which we gather our values from. But spirituality and a faith-based orientation are not the only place we develop an understanding of our guiding values. We take them from many places in our lives! Family, friends, teachers, coaches and team environments, lived experiences, literature, society, cultural norms you adopt or adhere to...the list is endless. While we all can probably acknowledge that we have values when it comes to naming them it can at times feel allusive.

Below is a web address to a list of identified values organized onto cards in a grid. It is not an exhaustive list, but it covers some decent ground.

https://motivationalinterviewing.org/sites/default/files/valuescardsort\_0.pdf

As an exercise you can print off this list of values, cut up the value cards and then organize them all into three categories. "Not important to me", "Important to me" and "Very important to me". Once you have them organized review the "Important to me" pile and consider for a second time these values. Do any of them go up to "Very important to me"? If you are not sure just trust your first instinct. Now count out the number of values that exist in the "Very important to me" pile. You may notice that there are a number of values that exist here. Your next task will be to pare down this pile in increments until you narrow that pile down to a top 5 and then a ranked out top 3 values. This can be difficult to do, so take your time and think it through.

Once you have your top 5 and ranked top three values use the section below to reflect on

these values. What makes them yours and to what extent do you live by them? And do your relationship with alcohol keep you aligned with these values or does some of these values get strained by your relationship to alcohol? Take time to reflect!			
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## Day 30: Identity and Alcohol

We all have various ways in which we orient ourselves to the task of developing our identity. Our identity is how we see ourselves, how we wish to be seen by others and how we go about understanding our past, present and future. There are many ways in which we identify ourselves. We fulfill different identifying relational roles in life, we are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, cousins, friends and colleagues. We identify by our gender, our sexual orientation, our race and ethnicity, our faith and religious orientation. We identify by our cultural background and through the communities in which we are raised from. There are so many ways in which we can choose to identify ourselves and these are just some of the examples.

Your task in this final step of your sampling of sobriety by taking A-Break is to determine, what have you learned about yourself? How have you identified in the past? How has taking A-Break shifted or perhaps reaffirmed how you want to identify in the world? If you decide to return to drinking, what lessons do you take with you that ensure the choice to drink doesn't interfere with your chosen identity and values going forward? If taking A-break has inspired you to continue down a sober path what steps must you take to maintain your motivation by reinforcing your autonomy to choose, continuing to develop the skills needed and defining the purpose of your choice now and in the future.

Take the time in the section below to collect your thoughts about the intersection of identity and your past, present and future relationship with alcohol.			

## Day 31: One Journey Ends

Congratulations!!!! You have made it to the end of taking A-Break! Regardless of whether you were successfully able to remain sober from alcohol throughout this process or if you have made it all 31 days without drinking the process of this resource was never solely about this outcome. The journey and what we learn along the way of that journey, how we face the challenges we come across and the spirit in which we show up has a tremendous amount of value if we orient ourselves to the reflective tasks this resource has encouraged.

What those lessons or realizations are, are defined by only by you. This journey may have just given you a nice tolerance break, a chance for your body to reset and cleanse itself. For others it could have been a chance to really make some formative choices about how they want to relate to alcohol going forward. Whatever the case, I commend you for taking the leap and trying this out.

My greatest hope is that this served as a helpful resource for you along the way and I very much want to hear about what you think might be helpful to change about this resource or about what other resources you feel will be helpful to have on campus to support students in making thoughtful decisions surrounding the choice to drink.

Take some time to write down your thoughts and feel free to forward your feedback and			
ideas on to me directly at <u>wkraman@norwich.edu</u> !			
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## **Acknowledgements:**

A big shout out to Tom Fontana and the students of the University of Vermont for the inspiration in creating this resource for the students here at Norwich University. With the input and support of students at UVM, Tom created the resource "T-Break Guide: A guide to help support you on a cannabis tolerance break". This original resource served as a guiding foundation upon which the "A-Break" resource stands.

I am very grateful for his ongoing support and guidance as a colleague in the field of substance misuse prevention and treatment.

If you are interested in the "T-Break Guide" as another supportive resource please reach out to me directly at <a href="wkraman@norwich.edu">wkraman@norwich.edu</a> or come by the office and I can provide you with a copy for your use.