



SOBER
ON A
DRUNK
PLANET
Giving up alcohol

**THE UNEXPECTED SHORTCUT
TO FINDING HAPPINESS,
HEALTH & FINANCIAL FREEDOM**

SEAN ALEXANDER

Sober On A Drunk Planet:
Giving Up Alcohol -
The Unexpected Shortcut To
Finding Happiness, Health and
Financial Freedom

By Sean Alexander

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To Mum and Dad - through all the vomit, late-night taxi services, drug dealer debt and drunken chaos that I caused, you have always loved and supported me.

This book was only possible because you kept me alive and out of prison!

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Introduction

Imagine teaching children that one of the most exciting things about becoming an adult is being able to take drugs.

Imagine convincing them that it's normal for good nights out to result in shaky, anxious mornings, with crashing headaches, empty wallets, and perhaps even vomit in the bed.

Imagine explaining that to have a "grown-up" holiday, adults may end up sleeping with people they don't like, get into fights, or wake up in a cell. They might not even remember any of it.

Don't worry kids, they're just normal "side effects".

It sounds mental. Because it IS mental.

We're not talking about illegal drugs (yet). We're just talking about socially acceptable alcohol. It's the drug children see everyone from their parents to their favourite celebrities partaking in. It's the focal point of funerals, birthdays, Christmas, holidays, weddings, christenings, divorces, bad breakups, dating, good weeks at work, bad weeks at work, getting a new job, leaving an old job, a drink before the game, after the game and probably during the game. The list goes on and on.

We live on a drunk planet.

Alcohol is everywhere and has been for centuries. Society teaches us that champagne means celebration, that a holiday is an acceptable time for drinking lethal cocktails in gigantic fish bowls, and that a dash of whiskey will help your child sleep. We're even taught that "hair of the dog" is the remedy for a hangover. And just when you think you've heard them all, someone rocks up claiming that a glass of wine is part of their "five a day".

As I said - MENTAL.

If alcohol were the magical, one-size-fits-all substance we're brainwashed into believing it is, why are there Alcoholic

Anonymous groups in almost every town? Why do celebrities that consume too much of it instantly go from being respected to being shamed? And why do nearly 30% of young people now decide not to drink at all? (The Guardian, 2018).

There are plenty of answers to those questions.

In many cases, people are discovering - as I did - that quitting booze can set your life on an entirely different path.

People are deciding to get ahead in life and become sober on a drunk planet. They are fed up with the crippling hangovers, the shame, the hangxiety and the many other side effects of alcohol. They want to experience life sober with everything that it has to offer.

It's a path that's exciting, fulfilling and healthy - and it's also increasingly fashionable. Dealing correctly with your emotions, waking up hangover free and enjoying life to its full potential never gets old.

Most importantly, it could also be the one thing that finally allows you to look in the mirror and like what you see.

So, what brings you here?

Perhaps, like "the old me", you have a life packed with all the outward signs of success but feel empty inside.

Maybe you're beginning to tire of the whole "work hard, play hard" thing and struggling to see the point.

Are you living for the weekend and then spending half the week recovering from the weekend? You might not realise it, but you could be spending over 100 days of each year feeling the depressing and physically undesirable "side-effects" of alcohol. Imagine what you could do with your life if you were supercharged for all of those days?

There's little point in trying to come up with the precise definition of "a problem". People have many different reasons for wanting to reset their relationship with alcohol. If that weren't the case, there wouldn't be millions participating in initiatives like Dry January and Sober October every year.

Even Alcoholics Anonymous is becoming less anonymous. The world is starting to sober up, and celebrities talk more openly about their battles with alcohol and other mind-altering substances.

Perhaps you're beginning to wonder if that nightly wine to "take the edge off" is really a great idea. Or maybe you desperately need to stop waking up on Monday mornings with a frazzled brain and a wallet empty of everything besides screwed up cocaine wraps.

Those may sound like two opposite extremes, but they can be closer together than many expect. You may be thinking, "oh, I don't get bad hangovers", or "drugs? I'd never do DRUGS!"

Well, as we've established, alcohol IS a drug. And it's the one that many high-profile scientists classify as more harmful than any other (The Economist, 2019). For many, it's also a huge gateway - both to other drugs and to years of bad decisions.

Plenty of people spend years or even decades "getting away with it". Or at least they think they are. They don't notice how the hangovers start to eat into the week, the gradual weight gain, or the friends and colleagues creeping ahead in life.

For other people, unexpected events and life changes quickly see "sustainable" drinking morph into "I need to do something about this". Anything from increased work stress to a redundancy, relationship breakdown or bereavement can cause things to escalate.

Regardless of where you're at, you don't have to reach the fabled "rock bottom" to enjoy all the benefits of sobriety. In fact, many people who've moved on from drinking rave about similar benefits and positive life changes - whether they were full-blown addicts, fans of "wine o'clock", or binge-drinking "weekend warriors".

If you're in any way doubting your relationship with alcohol, that's all the evidence you need. Presumably, you're not questioning your relationship with broccoli or fixating on whether you should cut back on reading or walking?

That's because we all know, deep down, that humans weren't intended to have a life where everything - positive and negative - is marked with alcohol. Children manage to play and have endless fun without it. But then something shifts, and millions of adults become convinced nothing can be fun without a beer, a glass of wine or a G&T.

There's a better way.

As you'll already know, this book is about giving up alcohol. However, it's important that we define what "giving up" means in this context.

"Giving up" is emotive language. It suggests we have to do without something desirable and that it's a loss.

Well, here's the good news, it's not like that at all.

If you're spending just a day or two a week hungover, you're "giving up" 50-100 days of your life, EVERY YEAR. And that doesn't account for time spent thinking about alcohol, planning occasions around it, and dealing with the chaos it can cause. Depending on how far down the rabbit hole you are, it could be consuming half of every year - or more.

THAT is a massive loss.

Similarly, you probably "gave up" many things as you reached adulthood: dreams, interests, and hobbies. If you followed the same trajectory as most people in the modern world, you probably swapped them for "going out". And for many people, "going out" means drinking.

I'm not for a moment saying that getting out there, partying and becoming an adult isn't a rite of passage and an awful lot of fun. But it IS part of the conditioning that makes alcohol such a crucial part of many people's lives. It's also where - for many - the bad habits begin to build.

Here's the fascinating part that's much-discussed in sobriety communities: It's not about what you give up; it's about what you get back.

One of the most used sayings within sober communities is that: “Sobriety delivers everything alcohol promised”. You hear that one a lot because it’s true.

The one thing that surprised me the most was how quickly sobriety delivers.

When you start to see how drastically different life is without alcohol, you begin to understand how much it impacted everything: health, relationships, finances, career and the spiritual side of life.

Think back to childhood and how “into” things you used to get before your time was taken up with the pressures of adulthood. Maybe it was sport, music, gaming, or one of a thousand other things.

That joy of being “at play” is still available to adults, but many swap it for the (empty and expensive) pleasure of heading to the bar for happy hour instead. The irony of “happy hour” is that yes, you might be happy for the hour or the evening, but if you are anything like I used to be, there’s nothing AT ALL happy about the next few days!

The reality is that you do gain much more than you lose when you quit alcohol.

Not only do you get that child-like enthusiasm back, but you also get to enjoy all the same things you enjoyed before: holidays, nights out, dating, Christmas, birthdays, friendships, sex!

That little list shows, once again, how alcohol pops up everywhere. Over time, we come to associate it with all of those things. We wonder if we’ll ever enjoy them the same way again. Well, along with millions of other sober people, I can assure you that you can.

And if you’re thinking of how much you “love the taste” of specific drinks, there’s a booming alcohol-free market catering to all the new non-drinkers. Long gone are the days when you only had one alcohol-free option on offer to you and were mocked by everyone in the pub for ordering it.

There are also much deeper issues to think about - and they're all things that giving up alcohol can improve.

If you're constantly worried you're not reaching your full potential - giving up alcohol can be the motivational rocket you need to get started.

If you need to repair damage to any area of your life - your health, relationships, finances, or career - giving up alcohol can be the missing key to turning your life around.

And if you search your soul and aren't all that convinced that you like yourself - giving up alcohol will allow you to heal.

Once again: you WILL gain FAR more than you lose.

So, what exactly will you gain from reading this book?

Here's a quick rundown:

First, you will discover the exceptional health and fitness benefits of quitting drinking.

Even a relatively small amount of alcohol can be incredibly damaging for your weight, skin, gut, and brain. Alcohol is a poison that the body isn't designed to process - hence why it comes in diluted form and why "alcohol poisoning" exists.

I can assure you that comments like "you look ten years younger" and "wow, you've lost weight and look amazing" never get old.

After health, we move on to finances. Drinking is expensive to start with, and it's also a substance that compromises your judgement and often leads to poor financial decisions.

Have you ever pressed the big red "f*ck it" button when you have had a few drinks, only to regret it financially for months or even years to come? It took me six years to fully pay off the debt from a last-minute holiday to Las Vegas! Four nights of "fun" for six years of debt. That doesn't seem like a fair trade!

I used to work in London's financial industry on a decent salary, but I STILL lived paycheck to paycheck. Quitting drinking can transform your finances - whether you need to

get out of debt, buy your first property, or simply want to start saving and growing your money. And you can do all of this quicker than you might expect.

Next, we look at relationships, spanning everything from dating to parenthood. No more relying on a few glasses of wine to calm your nerves before a big date. Sober dating is as raw as it gets!

Relationships do change if you're living a sober life, especially if drinking was a large part of it before. Thankfully, I can assure you that they change for the better.

After that, we talk about personal growth. Drinking alcohol, even just a couple of times per week, can create a significant negative feedback loop. A night out leads to a hangover, which leads to junk food and laziness. You then begin the following week with low motivation (and a scary bank balance) and crawl your way through to "Thursday is the new Friday" before doing it all again.

NOT drinking creates a different feedback loop, but a positive (and much better) one. Imagine waking up on a Monday morning with more motivation and money than you expected, and that happening week after week. This is where changes happen *fast*.

It's little wonder that so many sober people report huge achievements in the months and years after quitting drinking.

After talking about personal growth, we get spiritual, and that doesn't mean talking about God, unless you want it to. As David Bowie once said, "religion is for people who fear hell, spirituality is for people who have been there".

Many people who quit drinking find that the empty feeling of living week to week is replaced by something very different - the complete feeling of a well-fed soul. This chapter also touches on the (entirely optional) 12 step programme.

Next comes the FUN of being sober. It's a different kind of fun, but it's far from boring. I can assure you that the millions of sober people don't just sit at home feeling bored! They're

socialising, dating, achieving, and up early, indulging in hobbies while the drinkers sleep off Friday night.

We then talk about business and careers. While there are plenty of “functional” drinkers out there, an alcohol-free life enables you to take things to the next level.

A hangover-free life is, in itself, enough to transform a career. But add in the compound effect of constant clarity and extra energy, and things can get exciting at lightning pace.

In the final chapter, we look at the realities of being sober on a drunk planet. Booze is everywhere, and it doesn't disappear because you decide to stop partaking in it. The chapter looks at the environments you spend your time in and how they can change and evolve (for the better) when you stop drinking.

It's time for me to tell you a little more about myself.

I've been the once-per-week drinker, but I quickly became the finance job, flash car, nice house, high salary, drinking all weekend and ruining the week kind of drinker.

Full-blown drug addiction wasn't far behind.

I was never somebody who stopped at just one drink. The first time I went to the pub at the age of 14, when all you needed to get served was a friend who reached puberty early, I drank too much. My drinking has always been the same. It was never just one. Never.

The same thing happened with my drug-taking. I never had one line of cocaine - I had to have the whole bag.

University was a big catalyst that escalated my drinking. The drinking was heavy. I blacked out a lot, and alcohol-induced vomiting was often a feature. But it wasn't a problem, because - well - everyone else was doing it.

This pattern of drinking continued until I left university.

Then I found COCAINE - another substance that many movies would have you believe is the height of glamour.

Cocaine seemed to cure all the issues I had with alcohol. It stopped the booze-induced vomiting, which allowed me to drink more. I started to remember everything and feel like I was in total control.

The trouble was that I'd just swapped one drug's side effects with the equally debilitating impacts of another: My hangovers became "changovers" (cocaine-induced sleep deprivation). The cost of a night out quadrupled, and my underlying paranoia and low mood got increasingly worse.

Alcohol and drugs were "fun" for the first couple of hours of a night out. But then, my inability to stop meant I would always regret everything the following day. I'd have a horrible hangover. I'd beat myself up for making bad financial decisions. I'd hate myself for not going to the gym. I'd remember awful comments I'd made the night before. I'd eat poorly - again.

The same cycle of behaviour lasted for 17 years.

Albert Einstein once said that "insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". Every Sunday, I would tell myself that the next week would be the week I "got my sh*t together". But then I did what I always did - and got drunk.

By the time I reached my thirties, my hangovers had gone from lasting a few hours to lingering all week. By this point, a night of drinking and drug-taking was more akin to self-harm than being an "epic night out".

Attempts to "fix" myself and move to Thailand, Australia and South Africa didn't cure the problem I had with alcohol. They actually made it much worse.

Anonymous groups call this "doing a geographical".

Your problems don't magically disappear because you are in another place. Moving around can, in fact, isolate you even more - and give you more reasons to drink and drug.

Over time, it became very clear that external things weren't fixing my internal problems.

The “work hard, play hard” lifestyle turned into a “play hard all the time, and hope work doesn’t fire me” lifestyle.

Luckily, I made it through without getting sacked. However, I’m sure plenty of ex-employers thought that I was sh*t at my job. That’s because I was horrifically hungover or still drunk and high much of the time.

Having lost everything to addiction, I eventually reached my personal “rock bottom”. With nothing to my name other than a private medical policy, I finally asked for professional help and checked into rehab.

Rehab saved my life. It gave me the time to stop living in the same cycle of behaviour. Most importantly, I finally began to learn why I was drinking and drugging.

It became clear from my time in rehab that I’d been unhappy with how I looked and felt. That started way back when I was a child. Alcohol was my “medicine”. It would “take the edge off my insecurities”. The more insecure I felt, the more I drank and drugged.

After rehab, a considerable amount of family support, personal development, and having done the 12-step programme by attending Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, and a few others, I’m a very different person. Only once I gave up alcohol did I realise how “allergic” I was to it and how negatively the “reactions” impacted every area of my life.

As soon as I left rehab, I got a personal trainer and shifted 35kgs (77lbs) in just four months, mainly down to getting sober. The effect of getting fit coupled with getting sober was incredibly transformative. I managed to hold onto my job and then saved the money I needed to jump ship from the corporate world and start my own business.

With all the time and energy that sobriety has given me, I have been able to re-train as a counsellor, produce a sober podcast series and become a strength & conditioning coach and yoga instructor. Helping people get stronger, both physically and mentally, is why I love my new career and I’m able to bounce out of bed at 6 am each day.

I feel like I finally have a purpose to my days. All thanks to getting sober.

I've gone from the brink of bankruptcy to having savings, a roof over my head and a heart full of gratitude.

Most importantly, getting sober has finally turned me into someone who can look in the mirror and be proud of what he sees.

I wrote this book to help you question your relationship with alcohol and hear that life without alcohol can be AMAZING. Giving up alcohol does present some challenges, especially if you have never known anything different, but you deserve to understand why nobody ever regrets getting sober.

The benefits that I share with you aren't just benefits that have changed my life but gifts echoed across the ever-growing sober community. It doesn't matter if you identify as an addict, are someone who suffers "hangxiety" from their weekly night out, or an individual wondering whether alcohol is really your "friend". The benefits are for EVERYONE.

So what are those benefits?

They include looking (and feeling) younger and fitter, having more money, and having almost constant energy and clarity. This feeds into incredible careers, deeper relationships, fulfilling weekends, rejuvenating holidays - and even unbelievable sex!

Giving up alcohol makes you more driven, focused, and resilient. And it dramatically improves both your physical and mental health.

These benefits come quicker than you might expect, especially if alcohol plays a significant part in your life. You could see a marked change in yourself in just weeks, and the "upgrades" keep on coming as you get more sober time under your belt.

Giving up alcohol is INCREDIBLY TRANSFORMATIVE for every area of your life, and I can't wait to help you experience it for yourself.

Are you ready to benefit from the life-changing advantages of giving up alcohol and becoming sober on a drunk planet?

Let's begin by learning how to like what we see in the mirror. That starts with health and fitness - and giving up alcohol is one of the critical cheat codes for that.

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CHAPTER 1

The Sober Glow

We've mentioned looking in the mirror a couple of times already. There's a good reason for that.

Your reflection in the mirror is one of the first things you see every morning, and you keep on seeing it all day.

I came to hate my reflection.

Over 17 years of binge drinking, eating takeaways, drugging and smoking cigarettes, it's no surprise I wasn't happy with my appearance. You are what you repeatedly do.

My weight skyrocketed after university. Over time, I put on 51kgs (112 lbs). My skin was terrible, and I never felt comfortable in my clothes. It doesn't matter how much you spend on designer labels if you're not content with the body inside them.

Not only did I feel grotesque on the outside, internally, I was suffering as well. I had Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) brought on by alcohol, cocaine and cigarettes, yet I managed to kid myself they weren't impacting my health. My blood pressure was dangerously high, and my nose was constantly streaming.

I was a mess, both inside and out.

And we've not even covered the turmoil that was going on with my mental health - another byproduct of being constantly disappointed by what I saw in the mirror. But alcohol and drugs "helped" me forget about it, one day at a time.

You can't avoid that mirror, and you either like what you see, or you don't. If you don't, well, that's chipping away constantly at your happiness and self-esteem.

That's why we begin this section by talking about the health benefits of quitting drinking. They are countless, and you can start to enjoy them fast: clearer skin, transformative weight

loss, more muscle tone, and a massive boost in energy and clarity. All these health benefits are what we call the “sober glow”.

That’s a whole load of upgrades. And the best thing of all is that you can start to notice them within the first 30 days.

If you’ve been drinking regularly, without taking a prolonged break, you may not know what looking and feeling truly healthy can feel like. And, yes, going out for a “big one” once or twice a week does count as regularly!

Are you ready to find out how much better life can be?

Body Transformation: The Sober Method

Many of us drink to boost our confidence, reduce our inhibitions, and feel comfortable in ourselves and around others.

They’re certainly the main reasons I drank so regularly.

The key reason for my boozing was that I was unhappy in my own skin. There’s a cruel irony because the drinking, drugging, and all the things I was doing as a result (such as eating junk and failing to exercise) were causing me to put on weight. As such, I was becoming even less happy in my own skin.

It’s an incredibly vicious circle. But it’s not unusual. Millions of people follow the same path - week after week and year after year.

We’ll come on to how insanely calorific and unhealthy alcohol is in a moment. But first, I must emphasise that it’s not just the drinking itself. For me, the hangovers were doing at least as much damage. And I was hungover most weekends from the age of 15 to 31.

The longest I ever went without drinking alcohol during that period was one stretch of seven days. And that was only because I was on antibiotics.

Nobody does anything particularly useful during a hangover. Yes, you might make it to work and do the things you

absolutely have to do, but then you return home and reward yourself with a takeaway. People don't do things they don't absolutely have to do when they have a hangover. Eating well and exercising are usually the first things that get neglected.

As such, when you're regularly drinking, you end up stuck in a really damaging pattern. You don't have a chance of sticking to a healthy lifestyle.

I tried, half-heartedly, to get fitter and lose weight. I knew I wanted to, and I knew my weight gain was making me unhappy. But I sabotaged my plans at every turn.

Diets never worked for me because I'd never manage more than a week before a drinking session, and its aftermath got in the way.

The gym was equally unsuccessful. I never stuck to any sustained fitness routine because my boozing routines got in the way. The only time I saw the inside of a gym during a weekend was when I decided to do a spin class whilst still steaming from the night before. Almost vomiting onto the rider in front of me taught me that I couldn't mix nights out with exercise the next day.

Plenty of people will tell you, often with a smug sense of superiority, that the secret to weight loss is simply to "eat less and move more".

It's annoying - but the thing is, they're right.

To be a little more scientific about it, you must be in a *calorie deficit* in order to lose weight. That means that you need to be burning off more calories than you're taking in. (Standard daily calorie recommendations are 2500 kcals for men and 2000 kcals for women). (NHS UK).

Simply ensuring you have that deficit is, in theory, enough to shed some weight. But the movement part is crucial too. Exercise helps you burn more calories, which helps towards a weight loss goal.

It's important to point out that losing weight isn't the only option. It's not everybody's goal and may not be yours,

especially if you've managed to stay slender throughout your drinking days (I wasn't so fortunate!).

Health isn't defined by weight loss. Some people are more focused on bulking up and building muscle. Bulking up is achieved with a *calorie surplus* when you take in more than your recommended daily calorie allowance alongside doing suitable exercise.

Bodybuilders, for example, go through phases of calories surplus when they want to build muscle and then a calorie deficit when they want to lose fat. This is what they term "bulking" and "shredding" phases.

As you know, I'm a strength & conditioning coach now, but I want to assure you I'm not on a mission to turn you into a gym addict! The point I'm making is what you look like in the mirror DOES come down to calories in and movement out.

And that takes us back to booze.

Alcohol is packed with calories, and they're also EMPTY calories. This refers to the fact that alcohol provides little more than an energy source, with little nutrients we need to be strong and healthy.

Alcohol contains 7 calories (kcal) per gram, which is nearly as much as fat at 9 kcal per gram. Protein and carbohydrates come in at 4 kcal per gram.

Calories are *not* equal. A portion of broccoli at 200 kcal is not the same as a 200 kcal bottle of beer. People who regularly skip eating meals for booze will be missing out on essential nutrients that our body needs to thrive.

If the only way to get drunk was to sit at a bar eating endless spoonfuls of sugar, it seems probable that fewer people would do it! But calories-wise, millions of people are doing something similar. There can be up to five teaspoons of sugar in just ONE pint of cider - close to the maximum you're supposed to consume each day. (DrinkAware).

It's no wonder that people who drink regularly struggle to lose weight and tend to see their weight gradually rise. The science backs this up, with a study showing that young adults who

drink regularly have a 41% higher chance of becoming overweight. They have a 35% chance of crossing the line to “obese”. (Fazzino, Fleming, Sher, Sullivan and Befort, 2017).

It’s easy not to notice it’s happening, and the people closest to you often fail to see it too.

You know how it works: When you see a friend for the first time in a year, it’s instantly apparent whether they’re looking better or worse, fatter or thinner. But when you see somebody every day, you don’t notice a pound here or an inch there. That applies to seeing yourself too.

It’s time to scare you with some numbers:

We’ve already established that booze contains a lot of pointless, empty calories, but exactly how many often shocks people. Just one pint of 5% strength beer contains 239 kcals (the same as a full-size Mars bar), and there are 216 kcals in a 4.5% pint of cider.

A double gin and tonic, often seen as the more “low calorie” option, still contains 180 kcals.

And the thing is, we don’t usually just have one, do we? Sitting and eating six Mars bars back-to-back would be seen as “excessive”, but it’s not unusual for people to consume the same calories in beer on a casual night out.

It’s when you add the calories up that it starts to get truly mind-blowing. When you look at the following table, remember those daily calorie recommendations: 2500 for men, and 2000 for women. And remember, these calorie recommendations are based on a balanced diet (fats, proteins and carbohydrates), not a balanced diet of different alcoholic drinks!

	4 Drinks ("Casual Night")	8 Drinks ("Late Night")	12 Drinks ("Big Night")
Pint of 5% strength beer - 239kcal	956	1912	2868
Standard 175ml glass of 12% wine - 133kcal	532	1064	1596
Double gin and tonic - 180kcal	720	1440	2160
Pint of cider 4.5% - 216kcal	864	1728	2592

Sources: NHS UK, Drinkaware.

Looking at that table, you can see that it's possible to blow an entire day's worth of calories with just one "big night".

But we've barely begun. You've not even eaten yet.

It doesn't help that we often eat highly calorific food when we drink - both at the time AND afterwards.

That's no coincidence. Scientific studies show that drinking alcohol "favours overfeeding". (Tremblay & St-Pierre, 1996). Overeating during or after a session is almost a biological inevitability!

So let's add in a cheeky Big Mac meal from McDonald's. Not the large one, just the less-indulgent(!) medium size. That comes in at 1080 calories (McDonald's).

If you have a "late night" on the G&Ts, as per the table above, and finish off by inhaling that burger meal on the way home, you've already hit 2520 calories. That's more than the recommended daily number for men and over 500 more than the recommended number for women.

And that's before you've accounted for any other food that day - no breakfast, no lunch, no snacks.

We're only talking about a "late night", and not a "big night". And we've not yet thought about the next day.

When the hangover kicks in, we want "hangover food" - greasy, salty food packed with fats and carbohydrates - such as fried eggs, bacon, chips and takeaways. It's no wonder there's

always a queue of Deliveroo and Uber Eats drivers at McDonald's on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

My favourite hangover "cure" was always a Full English Breakfast.

Unfortunately, they typically come in at around 1300 calories. It's also a bit of a tradition to follow them with another trip down the pub. The cycle begins once again.

And I'm still not done!

As we've established, people with hangovers rarely choose exercise as their preferred activity. That means they don't burn off the calories either. An hour's training session in a gym can burn off 500-800 calories. Collapsing in front of Netflix or getting a cab back to the pub.....doesn't.

All of these numbers are bad enough when it's a one-off. It's when you start to look at the compound effect of doing it repeatedly that things become truly shocking.

When I was going out three times a week and making the poor food choices discussed above, I was consuming around 10,000 extra calories each week. That's an astonishing 52,000 calories per year - the equivalent of 48 Big Mac meals. It would take me 75 HOURS of running to burn that off. At a slow jogging pace, a marathon run takes around five hours. So I would have needed to run 15 marathons per year to compensate. And I HATE running!

Of course, it wasn't happening anyway. With the paralysing hangovers I experienced, the gym wasn't getting a look in. The result was grimly predictable: consistent unhealthy weight gain every year, high blood pressure, an incredibly unreliable digestive system, and shattered confidence and self-esteem.

And what did I do to compensate for that? Yes, I drank more and took more drugs. The cycle didn't stop until the drinking stopped.

So far, we've concentrated on calories and weight, but alcohol has yet another sting in its tail, ready to catch out those who do manage to get some exercise in between drinking sessions.

A peer-reviewed study showed that consuming excessive alcohol makes the muscles less able to benefit from exercise, “impair(ing) recovery and adaptation”. (Parr, Carmera, Arete, Burke, Philips, Hawley, Coffey, 2014).

So, even if you do manage to force yourself to the gym or out for a run, alcohol still compromises how much good the exercise does. If you’re looking to build muscle rather than lose weight, alcohol compromises your ability to do that, too.

Talk about adding insult to injury!

It’s crazy how vicious that circle of alcohol, poor food choices and lack of exercise truly is. However, the exciting part is that quitting alcohol creates a whole new circle - one that’s as healthy and rewarding as the old one is depressing and damaging. This new circle is achieved through the “Sober Method”.

Getting sober creates the time and energy to begin a fitness journey and become more active generally.

Once again, this isn’t about turning you into a fitness fanatic. Even if you’re a less “committed” drinker than I was, swapping the weekly session and its aftermath for 72 hours of healthier choices makes an enormous difference to your wellbeing.

There are plenty of ways to replace the “high” of a night out, but essentially it just needs to be something that gets you moving. Exercise creates a healthy and natural high. If it didn’t, there wouldn’t be gyms in every town and runners on every street!

Exercise is a great way to ease stress and manage your emotions. Since becoming a strength & conditioning coach, I’ve never had a client “regret” a training session!

Movement is medicine, and there are hundreds of choices open to you: hiking in nature, cold water swimming (not for the faint-hearted!), team sports, dance classes, pilates or yoga. Try all of them - you’ll have plenty of time to in sobriety.

Let's consider a circle that's virtuous instead of vicious. It's strikingly similar to the "drink - eat - put on weight - repeat" circle we've just looked at, but it transforms your health rather than destroys it.

First off: avoiding alcohol, in itself, means taking in far fewer calories.

Next, avoiding making bad food choices - when drunk and when hungover - means even fewer calories consumed. You also consume far more nutrients that allow your mind and body to thrive.

Not drinking means no hangovers, which means motivated, enthusiastic mornings and days where you have time available to exercise - and the drive to do it.

More exercise means more calories burned. Together with taking in far fewer calories, you can achieve the calorie deficit that results in weight loss a lot quicker than when you were boozing. Alternatively, if you're looking to bulk up and add muscle (rather than fat), not drinking means that you truly benefit from your workouts.

Exercise gives you a natural high that boosts your mood and improves your mental health. That's science, not false promises from a strength & conditioning coach! Exercise causes your body to release good stuff like serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. (Wasylenko).

Ironically, they're also the chemicals our brain hungers for when drinking and taking drugs. Unfortunately, substances don't work the way exercise does. Drugs and alcohol tend to deplete the brain of what you need to feel good, leaving you depressed, anxious and unmotivated.

Just as the negative circle of drinking just keeps on going, the healthy circle does too:

Your boosted mood makes you more inclined to do more exercise, and the weight loss (or muscle growth) begins to make that reflection in the mirror more appealing to you. (It also becomes more attractive to others, but we'll get on to sober sex and relationships in a later chapter!)

You're able to properly build muscle because you don't have alcohol messing with your myofibrillar protein synthesis (yes, that's a thing!). That means that your body's shape improves as well as its weight.

Finally, there's no underestimating the compound effect on your mental health (more on that in a moment).

Just as you begin to like that reflection a little more, other people often begin to notice too.

I can assure you that your first "you're looking in great shape", or "wow you're glowing", gives you a feeling you'll never get from a Long Island ice tea or a line of cocaine. That "sober glow" is a genuine thing - an effect where you begin to radiate positive energy and look fantastic to those around you.

The "Sober Method" to looking great is a feedback loop that keeps on going - a feeling of "levelling up" that becomes compelling in itself. And it can start as soon as the first alcohol-free week.

If you're one of the many people who has tried repeatedly to lose weight or get fit in the past, it may well be that quitting alcohol is the catalyst that makes a remarkable difference.

The good and bad circles work in similar ways but provide polar opposite effects. It's unsurprising that you don't tend to get the results you want if you try to keep a foot in both of them.

You also have nothing to lose by trying a different pattern for a while. You're not giving something up, as we've said. You're just trying something new. Giving up alcohol could be the answer.

When I finally gave up my own bad habits, I lost 35kg (77lbs) in just four months. It gave me the confidence I'd spent years looking for in alcohol and drugs.

It was a transformation so powerful that I decided to become a strength & conditioning coach, keen to help others and demonstrate how much exercise can transform lives.

It's surprisingly common to see people who've chosen sobriety move into this line of work - I call it the "Life Coach

Effect”. All have had their own transformation by giving up alcohol, and they want to help others experience the same thing.

Even if you’re somebody who doesn’t find exercise particularly appealing, there are plenty of ways to embark on your own fitness journey. Regular walking can create a time for podcasts, music, audiobooks and entertainment. Combine that with healthy eating, and you’re already on a path to life-changing benefits.

Don’t be surprised, however, if you start to become enthusiastic about more energetic activities, perhaps those you thought were beyond you before. The whole “look good, feel good” thing can get hold of you just as much as alcohol can.

A quick warning before we move on: If you are somebody who uses alcohol as a comfort blanket (as I did), there is the potential to find a new one elsewhere. For many, it ends up being food - most specifically, sugary food.

Sweets and other sugary treats make your body release dopamine, the “feel-good” chemical. Alcohol does that too, hence why many people end up with that “cross-addiction”. Furthermore, if you’ve been drinking regularly, your body is used to all the sugar that’s hidden away in the booze. (Silver Maple Recovery).

If you’re moving away from regular drinking and the kind of excess calorie intake laid out above, you probably have plenty of leeway for some treats. However, it is wise to educate yourself on the sugar content of those treats and not become a regular at the cake shop instead of your local bar! Moderation in all things!

In the following sections, we move away from the fundamentals of the weight and shape of the body, and onto other ways, booze messes with your system.

You’d think that after making you gain weight and stopping you from building muscle, alcohol would be done with you - but far from it. It likes to punish you for your indulgences in other ways too - starting with the skin.

Wow - You Look 10 Years Younger

There's perhaps no worse time to take a selfie than when you have a hangover: bags under the eyes, dry lips, and skin that somehow manages to be both greasy and dehydrated at the same time.

Drink for years on end, and it becomes likely you never see a photo of yourself that you're entirely happy with.

Towards the end of my drinking days, I looked (and felt) 20 years older than my birth certificate said I was. The alcohol alone was making me look drawn, tired and unwell, let alone the cigarettes and cocaine. When the FaceID unlock on your iPhone stops recognising you on "the morning after", or the person on your passport photo looks like an imposter, alarm bells start to ring!

Many people readily associate alcohol with being bad for the liver - we'll come to that shortly. Fewer people seem to know how badly drinking impacts the skin. When you see "before and after" photos of people who have quit drinking, one of the most striking things is how much more they sparkle and shine. It's that sober glow again!

You either look "healthy", or you don't, and the dehydrated skin of a regular drinker doesn't tend to look good.

Here's the science bit: Alcohol affects the skin in various different ways (WebMD, 2020). First off, it dehydrates you, leaving you looking bloated and "puffy". The bags under the eyes come from the poor sleep that's almost inevitable when you drink.

Of course, if like me, you put drugs in the mix too, you may not sleep at all. Instead, you stare at the wall for six hours, desperate to get ANY sleep before the work alarm goes off.

As if "bloated and puffy" weren't enough, alcohol can also make you look red and flushed, sometimes developing into full-blown rosacea. This can become a long-term problem, leaving a constant redness, as can rhinophyma, often known as "alcoholic's nose".

Some people have an allergy to alcohol that can result in hives, and booze can also trigger sun sensitivity. Then, in the long term, there are other conditions such as psoriasis, cellulitis and even skin cancer - all of which can be activated by alcohol.

Scary stuff, but scary stuff with a powerful solution: quitting alcohol.

Let's go back to what you see in the mirror. Even if you're fortunate enough to avoid the more severe consequences, drinking alcohol will have a detrimental effect on your skin.

The fortunate flip side is that giving it up is almost certain to leave you looking younger, more radiant and fresh-faced. And who wouldn't want that?

Having attended many Alcoholics Anonymous groups, I've spent plenty of time guessing the age of sober guest speakers. They always appear much younger than they are. The sober glow makes it very difficult to guess the age of anybody who hasn't been drinking for a while! Getting comments from people saying "wow - you look 10 years younger", when you walked around looking 20 years older than you actually were, never gets old either.

Next, we move inside the body, beginning with the gut. This may be an appropriate moment for a "Too Much Information (TMI)" warning.

The unavoidable truth is that alcohol makes some pretty grim stuff go on below the surface too.

Alcohol-Free Farts

The "garbage in, garbage out" cliché is stomach-turningly accurate when it comes to alcohol.

Ultimately, it's not a substance that humans were built to process. It IS poison, and the body rejects it as such. One place that this is brought into sharp focus is in the gut.

Being bloated and ending up with a beer belly (or wine belly) is the least of your worries here. Many drinkers, as I did, develop symptoms common with Irritable Bowel Syndrome

(IBS). Bloating, gas, cramping, diarrhoea, constipation and stomach pain were all frequent symptoms that I thought were “normal” until I stopped drinking.

Not only did I suffer from IBS but the equally unsexy heartburn and acid reflux.

“Heartburn is a burning feeling in the chest caused by stomach acid travelling up towards the throat (acid reflux). If it keeps happening, it’s called gastro-oesophageal reflux disease” (NHS).

The symptoms have been shown to be heavily triggered by alcohol (Pan, 2019) and I’m certain that coffee, smoking cigarettes and taking cocaine (which was my diet at the time) didn’t help either. I would regularly wake up with heartburn and a sour taste in my mouth. This led to bad breath, more bloating (I really didn’t need any help by this stage of my life) and it’s hardly surprising that I was single for the majority of my drinking days!

The mad thing is, I accepted all these symptoms, as “normal” and constantly felt uneasy because I wasn’t sure what my body would do next. You would think those symptoms alone are enough to put you off drinking for life, but there are plenty more to talk about.

Alcohol is linked to all kinds of other stomach conditions such as gastritis, ulcers, and the ominous-sounding leaky-gut syndrome. (Libbert, 2021).

The fact that alcohol dehydrates you is enough, in itself, to cause havoc on your digestion. Regular drinkers often tolerate bouncing back and forth between episodes of constipation (caused by dehydration and excess intestinal bacteria) and diarrhoea.

To make it all just a little worse, repeat spells of constipation can give you haemorrhoids. As if proof were needed that movies provide an unrealistic view of alcohol, we often see James Bond ordering a martini but are never shown him in the chemist asking for pile cream!

The simple fact is that your stomach doesn't want alcohol inside it. And the inconvenience of an "unreliable" digestive system can get a whole lot worse for those who cross the line into regular, chronic drinking.

Your overall level of health is hugely influenced by the health of your gut. (Recovery Nutrition, 2021). Poor gut health can put you in a position of systemic inflammation, which can increase your chance of Alzheimer's, heart problems, diabetes, Parkinson's, and various cancers.

There's plenty you can do to improve your gut health, hence store shelves lined with probiotic yoghurts, supplements, kefir and kimchi. But the one thing guaranteed to undermine everything else you do for your gut is pouring alcohol into it. Your digestive system doesn't want it - and will react accordingly.

Add in all the other things that come hand-in-hand with alcohol: bad food, poor exercise, and maybe drugs too, and it's no surprise your system kicks up a fuss.

No two bodies are the same, so your mileage will vary in terms of gut health. Perhaps you're not noticing any major effects - yet. However, it's extremely common for newly sober people to be taken aback by how much things change in that department.

For fear of painting too much of a picture, it's common for people's digestion to move from "unpredictable" to "regular as clockwork" after quitting drinking. Newly sober people often realise how much they'd come to "just put up with" things like indigestion, heartburn and a background feeling of nausea. It certainly was my "normal" when I was drinking.

The one thing that's indisputable is that quitting drinking will work magic for your gut health. And that involves far more than just food and digestion.

People often talk about "gut instinct" and "trusting the gut". The more that scientists research it, the more we come to realise just how much of a part the gut plays in our overall feeling of wellness.

The gut is often referred to as “the second brain”. It links to the brain and plays a vital part in our feelings and intuition (Mind and Body Works). Expressions like feeling “sick to the stomach”, or “having butterflies”, emphasise this connection. Good gut health is key to good health more generally, both mental and physical.

After finally eliminating the chaos that alcohol wreaks on the digestive system, you are newly free to “trust your gut” - in more ways than one! Not only can you live a life without a mental map of the nearest toilet facilities, but you can also begin to support that “second brain” role that the gut plays.

As you build up sober time, you begin to get more in touch with your body, and with your “gut instinct”. A dependable digestive system is, for many, a huge upgrade in itself, but the benefits can go way beyond just having alcohol-free farts.

That’s enough “toilet talk” for now. Even though we’ve already mentioned some pretty terrifying illnesses, there’s worse to come.

Shaking, Sweating And Hallucinating (Signs of Alcoholism)

So far, we’ve stuck to a light-hearted tone, despite references to several serious and life-threatening conditions that can be caused and exacerbated by alcohol.

There are no quips or funny analogies in this section: alcohol dependence is a deadly serious thing. Over three million people are killed by the “harmful use of alcohol” each year (World Health Organization, 2018).

Some people shake, sweat and have hallucinations when they go without alcohol. All of those are physical - and extremely dangerous - signs of alcohol dependence.

Others are as follows:

- Sweating.
- Hand tremors (shakes).
- Insomnia.

- Irritability.
- Anxiety and depression.
- Appetite loss.
- Headaches.
- Vomiting.
- Nausea.
- Fast pulse (above 100 beats per minute).
- Restlessness.
- Irritability.
- Disorientation.
- Breathing problems.

Source: Drinkaware.

Other issues can cause several of these symptoms, but the crucial point is that anybody who drinks regularly should seek professional medical advice before stopping abruptly.

Abruptly stopping alcohol and experiencing alcohol withdrawal syndrome can lead to seizures and sudden death. It's no joke, so always speak to your doctor before going "cold turkey". Specific symptoms to look out for include hallucinations, repeated vomiting and severe shaking.

Looking back on the symptoms I inflicted on myself, I'm extremely thankful that I stopped drinking and drugging. Although I got off relatively lightly in terms of physical withdrawals, my drinking and drug-taking resulted in numerous trips to the doctor, late-night visits to the emergency room, and overnight hospital stays.

You'd think that would be enough to shock a person into taking action.

It wasn't.

What can come next?

Nothing good: Liver conditions such as cirrhosis and fatty liver, strokes, heart disease, and many cancers including

throat, colon, rectum, breast and mouth (CDC). The answer to what comes next is - sadly - serious illness and death.

Unfortunately, giving up drinking doesn't buy you a free pass to eternal good health. But it does drastically reduce the chances of a lot of bad things happening, and of you dying prematurely.

The science supports the likelihood of that happening. People who drink more than 18 alcoholic drinks each week can expect to live for four or five years less than non-drinkers. (Therrien, 2018). Even more, "moderate" drinkers, consuming 10-15 drinks per week, generally die one or two years before their time.

There's a lot you can do, achieve and enjoy in those years. And it's not only about your life being cut short. The time actually spent drinking and recovering can add up to many more years, as we will look at a little later.

If you're keen to determine whether you are drinking too much, or developing a dependence, Drinkaware has an assessment tool that is included in the resources section of this book.

I would emphasise the importance of speaking to your doctor if in any doubt. Alcohol is a widely available drug that affects millions of people. It won't be the first time they've helped somebody with it.

There are some further resources at the back of this book that can give you further help and guidance.

Next, we move from physical health to mental health - something that could be in short supply if you drink regularly.

Becoming Less Mental

I've already painted a pretty bleak picture of my life on alcohol and drugs. But it gets worse.

I lost count of how many times I woke up on an unfamiliar sofa - with no wallet, no phone, no keys, and no idea of what had happened the night before. Add in the raging hangover, and you have the dreaded "hangxiety".

So many days were spent piecing together the events of the night before and frantically trying to repair the damage - all whilst feeling shaky and sick, with a banging headache and a sense of impending doom and descending depression. And then I had work on Monday!

It's little wonder that "you never regret waking up without a hangover" is such a sober cliché.

What makes those hangxiety days even worse is that you still have all the problems you had when you started drinking the night before. There's a good chance you've made them worse.

A "few beers" to get over some work stress? Well done, you still have the work stress, but now you have to do the presentation with shaking hands and an aroma of stale tequila.

"Some" wine because you were fretting about money? Congratulations, you now have even less money.

"Dutch courage" because you were worried about the big date? Well, you blew your chances when you started slurring, and they've already blocked your number because of the 2 am text messages.

Using alcohol to try to "deal with" feelings and emotions is laughably flawed. It's incredible that anybody still tries to do it. Many ex-drinkers refer to it as "playing life on hard mode".

Homer Simpson probably isn't the first person you'd turn to for mental health advice, but there's a lot of wisdom in the well-used quote: "To alcohol! The cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems".

Alcohol doesn't fix mental health problems. It's not even a particularly effective crutch. Any relief it provides is short term, at best.

When you stop drinking, you begin to recognise the insanity of using alcohol to ease you through the awkward first 30 minutes of a social event. For some, the price of that is doing something foolish, and spending the next week regretting it. And, of course, you may regret certain things for years. I'm still ashamed of falling through the champagne tower at my friend's engagement party - sorry, Aimee and Matt.

However each night ends, you generally get an incredibly poor trade-off for 30 minutes of “taking the edge off”.

Alcohol never helps with mental health problems. It adds to them. And, once again, science backs that up.

Alcohol is a strange substance. It initially acts as a stimulant, causing your brain to release dopamine, the “happy hormone” (Healthline). It increases your heart rate, boosts your energy levels, and lowers your inhibitions.

But alcohol is, first and foremost, a depressant. It also binds to your gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) receptors, which has a sedation effect. At its core, alcohol is a “downer” drug. It also inhibits glutamate, messing with your brain, nerve and memory function. (AddictionCenter).

Then, in another cruel twist of irony, it reduces your release of all that cheery dopamine (when consumed in larger doses). That, right there, is why so many people start the night upbeat but end it with a “sad head” or an “angry head”.

The chemical tailspin continues after you stop drinking. While you’re consuming alcohol, your body begins to release cortisol, known as “the stress hormone” (Buddy T, 2020). Your cortisol levels continue to “spike” for some time. Those who drink a lot need to wait for a WEEK until cortisol levels normalise (Loria, 2017).

Cortisol comes from the adrenal glands and is the thing that makes people edgy, jumpy and panicky. When the depressive, sedating effects of alcohol begin to wear off, the cortisol really goes to town. This often manifests itself when you wake up with a start at 4 am, heart thudding after a night of drinking, with a mouth drier than the Sahara desert.

The cortisol continues its assault in the days after a session, playing a large part in the “hangxiety”. Cortisol is widely known as “nature’s built-in alarm system”. (WedMD, 2020). Is it any wonder that flooding your brain with it causes you to jump at your own shadow?

To add insult to injury, while cortisol is battering your mental health, it’s doing bad stuff to your physical health too. An

excess of cortisol causes the body to release insulin, and the extra energy ends up stored as fat. (Hayes, 2018). It also joins in with the alcohol in making you crave junk food.

And it's not done with you yet. Excess cortisol makes it harder for the body to build muscle. And if you do exercise while it's flooding around you, your muscles will be more tense and susceptible to injury. It makes recovery harder too.

The really scary part is how long the cortisol effect can last. If levels of your key stress hormone can go haywire for a *whole week* after drinking, your mental health doesn't stand a chance. If you drink regularly - even weekly - the cycle of damage begins again before your brain has repaired itself from the previous assault.

There's no surprise alcohol is so often linked to depression and anxiety. It's an actual depressant, and it overloads your brain with a hormone that literally *causes* anxiety!

That makes quite a mockery of the whole "taking the edge off" theory, doesn't it?

Booze fogs up your brain, messes with your memory, and makes you far less able to deal with the inevitable challenges that life throws at you. Thankfully, as with the physical side of things, you can repair the damage by quitting.

A study of recovered alcoholics showed "cognitive and mental abilities" returning to those who quit drinking, becoming "indistinguishable" from nonalcoholics of the same ages (DeNoon, 2006). There was a small exception around "spatial orientation". Recovering alcoholics may always be a little worse at reading maps and assembling flat-pack furniture!

Perhaps the most rewarding mental health "upgrade" from quitting alcohol is learning to cope with life's complications without chemical "assistance".

For example, newly sober people quickly realise that almost everybody is nervous at the start of a party or work event. It's not necessarily easy, but with time you realise that you relax and notice your inhibitions falling away after a short while anyway.

Just think about young children at a birthday party. They often cling to their parents at the start or stay at the edges of the room. By the end, they're tearing around the place and don't want to go home. That's not because they're drinking alcohol!

It all adds up to another one of those virtuous circles. Over time, you come to learn that you manage just fine without the crutch. That boosts your self-esteem, making you manage even better the next time. You also immediately remove the drunken misdemeanours and the hangovers.

There's a lot to be said for the "radical clarity" you gain when you stop drinking. You cease having to ask yourself whether you were too loud, too argumentative or too "over the top". You become able to own your choices and decisions, knowing it was you that made them, and not the booze.

And as with all of the positive effects of giving up alcohol, this compounds over time. Good decisions and positive experiences breed *more* good decisions and positive experiences - instead of bad breeding bad.

Giving up drinking isn't necessarily a magic cure for your mental health. There may well be anxiety, depression and other conditions remaining within the real, post-alcohol you. They could well have been why you started drinking too much to begin with. But at least you get a chance to know what you're dealing with.

Self-medicating your mental health with alcohol robs you of that chance. It's like trying to drive a car without an engine. You're not going to get very far.

When you're sober, and your mind, your body and your gut are able to operate as they were designed to, you become much more in tune with yourself. Your intuition sharpens, and you finally get to learn about your "baseline" moods and levels of anxiety. You begin to learn which situations you struggle with and to acknowledge areas where you might benefit from some help.

When drinking alcohol is the response every time you "feel a bit off", you never truly know how to manage thoughts, feelings and situations. You may be pleasantly surprised and

find that you're considerably more "zen", purely due to quitting alcohol. However, you may also feel you need some extra assistance.

Getting some counselling/coaching can be a great way to build your self-awareness and work further on that intuition. We look at that in a little more detail later in the book.

Although there are no guarantees, many people do find that giving up alcohol vastly improves their mental health. Another sobriety cliché (there are lots of them!) is, "I always thought alcohol was relieving my anxiety - I didn't know it was causing it."

The only way to know for sure is to try sobriety out for yourself.

Doing Stupid Sh*t

The health implications of drinking too much are clear, but there are other dangers too. They can also have some terrifying impacts on your physical and mental health, and on your day-to-day life and your future.

The harsh truth is that alcohol can make you do some really stupid sh*t.

In the US, in one year alone, drunk drivers attempted 147 million car journeys (Masterson, 2022). Around one-third of deaths in car accidents involve a drunk driver.

Even though drink driving is illegal around the world (with differing limits on what is tolerated), attitudes in society towards drink driving are INSANE. The amount of times I have heard the saying 'I am a better driver when I have had a few drinks' shows how drunk this planet really is.

There are plenty of "nice people" serving long prison sentences for drink driving offences where they thought they could get away with it.

Deciding to get behind the wheel of a car after too many drinks is just one of the millions of acts of stupidity that can be triggered by alcohol. Even "superficial" trips and falls can

leave you needing a trip to the hospital or with an injury you have to spend weeks recovering from and explaining away.

If you're a regular drinker, you may or may not have injured yourself whilst drunk. If not, you can probably think of a few times when you came close. Every time you overindulge, you're rolling the dice on that being the time when you wake up with more than just a headache and a sense of regret to deal with.

It's not just the risk of arrest, death and physical injury (although they should be bad enough). Lowered inhibitions and an impaired sense of judgement can seriously mess with your risk perception.

“Stranger danger” isn't just something children need to worry about. Drinking makes you vulnerable, and while you may “get away with” going home with random people many times, the next time could always be the time you put yourself in serious peril.

There is an inevitable sexual side to this, too: waking up next to somebody you don't remember meeting doesn't just fill you with shame, it also puts you at risk of STIs and unplanned pregnancies.

I could write a whole other book about the bad decisions I've made (and the terrifying risks I've taken) while under the influence. But I am fortunate; I ended up in rehab and not the other two places addicts go; prison or the local cemetery.

Alcohol was a gateway drug for me, as it is for many people. I didn't tend to buy cocaine when sober, but it became almost inevitable after the third drink. The risks around drunkenly buying drugs are many - from getting caught picking them up and being arrested, to inadvertently snorting rat poison. Once again, this is an area where you can “get away with it” a thousand times before coming unstuck the next.

All of these risks fit into this chapter on health because the knock-on effects can affect your health. Drunken escapades can fill you with shame, dread and anxiety even if the worst doesn't happen - and that's kryptonite for your mental health. You can spend weeks/months/years thinking about how close

you came to disaster or wondering if your phone's going to ring (or the police will come knocking) about something you don't even remember doing.

And when your luck does run out, it can run out in spectacular ways. Any one of those 147 million drunken car journeys could end in arrest, prison time, a lost job or death. That's not melodrama or exaggeration - because many of them do.

It might never be you until it is you.

There's a reason - many reasons - why alcohol often tops the table in rankings of dangerous drugs. People often say that if it was discovered now, there's no way it would be legal. The fact it's a drug that's everywhere doesn't mean you're not playing with fire by using it. The next time could always be the time that things go seriously wrong.

The arguments for being sober on a drunk planet are already rather compelling: More confidence, better looks, no more pointless guilt, less chance of developing a serious illness that you will blame yourself for, and less chance of doing something you'll regret for the rest of your days.

But health and sanity is just the start. The next chapter talks about something most people want more of - money.

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CHAPTER 2

The Financial Freedom of Sobriety

Alcohol is expensive. Drugs are even more expensive. Late-night taxis are expensive. Takeaways are expensive.

It's all expensive. And it doesn't matter if you feel you "can afford it".

Working as a financial consultant in London, my salary was decent - well above average. But my inability to say "no" meant I kept going out and ending up with nothing left to show at the end of each month. I was choosing a lifestyle over everything. All I had was patchy memories, anxiety from drunken behaviour, and debt.

I managed to convince myself that I was living a life people dreamed of. And again, that cultural myth of the "glamour" around drinking and partying creeps in.

I now know how wrong I was.

The Cost Of Hangovers

In the previous chapter, we learned some hard lessons about the calorific cost of alcohol. Now let's look at the actual cost - Pounds and Pennies, Dollars and Cents.

For these examples, we look at some of the costs of a typical London night out. Different countries and cities vary, but it all adds up - wherever you are and whatever salary you are on.

It's all relative at the end of the day - if you spend more than you earn, you are in debt. If you save more than you spend, you are in credit.

We'll start with a pretty average "late night" on the G&Ts. The same one we discussed in the previous chapter - the one that weighs in at over 2500 calories.

Item	Cost Each	How Many?	Total
Gin and Tonic in a city bar.	£9 (\$12)	8	£72 (\$97)
Taxi home	£30 (\$41)	1	£30 (\$41)
Drunk food	£10 (\$14)	1	£10 (\$14)
Hangover food	£10 (\$14)	1	£10 (\$14)
		Total	£122 (\$166)

US Dollar costs are based on an approximate exchange rate of £1/\$1.36.

Perhaps £122 (\$166) doesn't sound like that much. Or maybe it sounds like a lot. But remember, this can be calculated for whatever you earn and spend on a typical night out.

The above example represents a pretty tame night. If you do a "tame night" twice each week, those nights cost you £12,688 (\$17,256) per year.

We've not even allowed for anything other than cheap takeaways, nor thought about the odd bottle of wine or pack of beer you purchase for a quiet night in.

Now let's look at the figures that made me too scared to check my bank balance for many years. Here's what a real all-nighter, aka the "big night" could look like for me:

Item	Cost per drink	How many?	Total
Pint of beer	£5 (\$7)	6	£30 (\$42)
Glass of wine	£7 (\$10)	3	£21 (\$30)
Cocktail	£12 (\$16)	3	£36 (\$48)
Round of shots	£30 (\$41)	1	£30 (\$41)
Club entry	£20 (\$27)	1	£20 (\$27)
Gram of Cocaine	£60 (\$82)	2	£120 (\$164)
Packet of Cigarettes	£12 (\$16)	2	£24 (\$32)
Taxi home	£30 (\$41)	1	£30 (\$41)
Food (Before and After)	£30 (\$41)	1	£30 (\$41)
		Total	£341 (\$466)

US Dollar costs are based on an approximate exchange rate of

£1/\$1.36.

When you get truly caught up in the “party scene”, the cost is staggering. The really crazy thing is that it almost becomes a badge of honour to have “a £341 night”.

Everything in life is relative: You may not have nights quite like the one on the table above. I had MANY nights that cost MUCH more than that, especially those that started out with planned activities or began with a fancy meal.

That “£341 night” happened a lot.

Whichever way you do the sums, the end result is terrifying. Just one of those “big nights” every couple of weeks adds £8,866 (\$12,058) to the annual “party lifestyle” total, bringing it up to £21,554 (\$29,314).

And we’ve not even thought about what happens on holiday, at Christmas, on your birthday, on everyone else’s birthday, at gigs and festivals, and at every other “special” occasion.

It’s little wonder that despite my high salary, I always spent every penny. In fact, I went further than that and sunk into debt. I was living beyond my means and not even thinking about saving.

Debt’s not unusual. 63% of adults in the UK have some personal debt (Calic, 2022). But I was in a good job with a good salary. I was also handing over more than £20,000 to bartenders, drug dealers and takeaway restaurants every year. There really was no excuse for being part of that statistic.

I would highly recommend calculating the rough annual cost of your own drinking. Don’t just include the alcohol itself because - as we’ve seen - all of the associated costs add up too.

You may also need to include what I describe as alcohol-related “f**k it” moments - such as last-minute festival tickets and short trips to Las Vegas and Ibiza, funded by a credit card. These don’t seem like shrewd investments when you look at them through sober eyes. Four days away can result in debt that can take literally years to pay off.

What makes these trips even worse value is that with booze and drugs involved, you usually get home needing another holiday to recover!

Even if your own total spent on “living it up” isn’t as jaw-dropping as mine, it’s still almost certainly a significant amount. Even a couple of half-decent bottles of wine each week adds up to over £1000 (\$1351) each year - and that’s if you buy them to drink at home.

Once again - alcohol is expensive.

And it gets worse.

Hangovers don’t do your finances any good either.

People don’t tend to think about investments, pensions and long-term plans when they have hangovers. It’s enough effort to deal with the Deliveroo order and decide what to watch on Netflix.

So as well as spending too much and possibly borrowing too much, you’re also doing nothing to move forward. It’s possible to spend years doing this - as I did - whilst failing to notice that other people are getting ahead while you’re standing still.

Do all this, week after week, and you’re stuck in another one of those vicious circles we keep talking about.

Thankfully, it has the same powerful solution: giving up alcohol.

The Sober Bonus - £506,898 (\$689,381)

Just as you can spend an incredible amount of money on going out drinking, you can save a significant amount by not doing it. The weight drops off, and the money begins to pile up!

This is another example of swapping a bad feedback loop for a good one.

In my case, alcohol was the gateway to all kinds of stupid stuff: gambling, buying drugs, eating fatty takeaways, and getting taxis instead of waiting three minutes for a train.

All of those were things I'd never do sober - so when I stopped drinking, they ALL stopped. That's a lot of money saved.

Newly-sober people are often shocked by how quickly they begin to save money. There are several reasons for this:

First off, sober people perform better at work. Let's shake off the whole "it doesn't affect my work" thing. It does if you're going through the motions and taking days off "ill" from work. People do notice when colleagues are grey and shaky in meetings, when they're late, when they smell of alcohol, and when they're the loudest and drunkest at work events.

As we covered in the previous chapter, quitting booze does magical things for your physical and mental health. Arrive at work with more energy, vigour and mental clarity, and people will notice. You will enjoy it more too.

That "sober glow" comes into play again. Your bosses will see the change in you - and all kinds of good things follow from that. More interesting work, more scope for promotion, bigger bonuses, and a real chance of getting a decent pay rise!

As a non-drinker, everything's different when 5 pm rolls around too. Suddenly, there are many more options beyond hustling to happy hour or heading home to nurse the previous night's hangover.

You quickly realise you have plenty of fuel left in the tank for side hustles, passion projects, second jobs and start-ups.

When you suddenly have a whole load of extra energy injected into your life, you feel like anything is possible - and it is. Many people in sobriety go on to become successful actors and actresses, publish books, become coaches, start businesses - and finally make money from the things they're passionate about.

Let's go briefly back to the "liking what you see in the mirror" thing.

Once you begin the process and start to build some self-esteem, you will become more comfortable with working on your own happiness.

It's easy to become conditioned to certain expectations: what work you can do, what you can expect to earn, what limitations you have. A lot of that conditioning begins at a very early age. But you can shake it off and begin to manifest better things for yourself. I highly recommend Dr Joe Dispenza's "Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself" for more on manifestation.

With alcohol out of the picture, you have more energy, more time, more confidence, more motivation, more money, more pride. You have less guilt, less debt, less shame - and less of a headache.

When you put all of those things together, you begin to see things very differently: Why NOT write the book? Why NOT move abroad? Why NOT start the business? Why NOT take up the sport you showed promise in as a kid? Why NOT try that career change?

The best part is that all those things you can do are probably things you *wished* you could do while you were still living for the weekend - the things you never got around to. Well, you can get around to them now.

Another side effect of this particular virtuous circle is that you can start thinking about the future. Saving and growing your money might not seem very "rock and roll" to the party animal in you - but reaching retirement age without a cent to your name isn't a good look either.

The first time you get to the end of the month with money leftover instead of an overdraft and a scary credit card bill, your mindset begins to change. Maybe you could have investments, savings, and exciting long-term goals.

Drinking and drug-taking is a rather impatient way of obtaining short-term gratification - but it doesn't last. It's money that goes - quite literally - down the drain.

Delayed gratification, which comes with the power of saying "no", can allow you to reach goals you never thought possible before. And saying "no" doesn't mean being "boring". It means you're setting clear boundaries and not giving into the

demands of others. Saying “no” doesn’t mean giving things up, it means getting more in the long run.

Going back to the figures we looked at earlier, let’s imagine you save the amount we arrived at for having a fairly tame night out a couple of nights per week (£12,688). If you managed to put that amount away somewhere where it earned 5% per year, you’d have around £190,000 (\$258,400) in ten years. Nearly £50,000 (\$68,000) of that would be interest.

If you went on a night out like I did, the numbers are even more staggering. If you do two of those big nights each week, you’re spending £35,464 per year. Put that away for a decade at the same rate, and you have £506,898 (\$689,381). Of that, £116,794 (\$158,840) is interest.

(Source: The Calculator Site, Compound Interest Calculator).

Your own numbers will vary - but even if you’re spending less, it still adds up to things like house deposits, weddings and new cars - perhaps all the above!

At this point, it seems right to emphasise something both cliched and unavoidably true: money cannot buy you happiness. As Will Rogers said, “too many people spend money they earned, to buy things they don’t want, to impress people that they don’t like.”

Joking aside, you do learn in sobriety that buying “stuff” - faster cars, bigger houses, fancier holidays, and endless deliveries from Amazon - only delivers a similar, temporary happiness to drinking.

Excessive spending can even come with its own hangover, in the form of “buyer’s remorse”. This is the “feeling of regret” that often follows a large purchase, often triggered when you don’t end up using the holiday home or the convertible as much as you expected, or when the purchase doesn’t bring the happiness or feeling of satisfaction that you anticipated. It’s highly likely you’ve experienced that feeling before!

We’ve said a lot about money in this chapter, but it’s important to see it as a bonus, and not as the sole reason to give yourself a better life away from alcohol.

Inner wealth is always the winner, and that wealth comes when you're happy to sit with yourself on a Saturday night, not needing anyone or anything to make you feel content. Thankfully that comes as part of the sobriety package too, as we will come to in a later chapter.

Don't worry, you can be sober, happy AND rich! But health, inner peace and fulfilling relationships are more important for a happier existence. The relationships are what we move onto next - from friendships to the daunting practice of sober sex.

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CHAPTER 3

Sober Relationships

Relationships change when you stop drinking. Overwhelmingly, they change for the better - but it's important to know what to expect.

I can reassure you, right now, that sober people don't look back and wish they had their dysfunctional and toxic relationships back - so don't worry about what you might lose. You gain so much more.

In this chapter, we cover many aspects of how relationships change when you decide to be sober on a drunk planet - from dating to parenthood.

A theme that runs through all of this is that sobriety tends to give you much deeper relationships, but usually with fewer people. Nowhere is that more noticeable than with friendships - so that's where we'll begin.

The Sober Cull

Here's a scenario from my drinking days - one that played out literally hundreds of times: I'd go into work on a Friday morning full of good intentions. This would be the weekend I'd get stuff done, play golf, eat well, sleep well, and not overspend.

But a colleague would suggest a "quick one" to shake off the stress of the week, or a mate would phone with the idea of a meet-up on the way home.

Ten drinks later, the weekend would be ruined, along with at least half of the following week.

This situation is familiar to millions of people and happens week after week, year after year: Weekend plans thrown out of the window and swapped for a brief feeling of being "fun" and "spontaneous", followed by days of feeling paralysed and paranoid on the sofa. What a waste.

People who drink regularly often find themselves in a crowd of “drinking friends”. If you have a crew where every plan revolves around a bar or a club, that probably applies to you.

There’s a famous quote from motivational speaker Jim Rohn, saying that “you’re the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” There’s a lot of truth to that. If boozing is all your friends do, that’s all you end up doing.

It’s worth asking yourself what your friendships entail beyond the booze (or, if relevant, the drugs). Perhaps alcohol really is secondary, but it’s not at all unusual for friendship groups to build up around nothing more than a shared passion for boozing.

If that feels familiar to you, don’t worry. It may seem a little daunting to turn your back on that crowd, but I can assure you better things await.

If you are part of a group like that, you can expect two things to happen when you quit drinking - things that are often referred to as “the sober cull”.

First, you may find some of the group shun you, or are dismissive of your efforts. Thankfully, in early sobriety, this can be a good thing. Initially, you won’t be too enthusiastic about spending time with people who are drinking hard anyway.

The next thing that happens, as your confidence and self-esteem grow, is that you become more selective about who you want to spend time with. This quote from Rikki Gale is relevant here:

“I used to walk into a room full of people and wonder if they liked me... now I look around and wonder if I like them.”

As you emerge as a newly-sober person, you’ll almost certainly be keen to reevaluate who you want around you. Who do you want those “people you’re the average of” to be?

Some of the sorting will be done for you: Be alert to the people saying “can’t you just have one?” or “you’re no fun anymore!” Those people may have to go. If they can’t support your desire for a better life, they shouldn’t be part of it.

Perhaps your desire to confront your own bad habits is shining an uncomfortable light on their own.

As a sober person, you get used to saying “no”. Once you’ve found the strength to say “no” to alcohol and drugs, saying “no” to a single night out is no challenge at all.

It’s all about replacing the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) with the Joy Of Missing Out (JOMO). It’s delayed gratification again, both on a short-term level and a long-term level.

By saying no to a Friday night in the bar, you get to spend the weekend doing the things you actually wanted to do. Longer-term, you have the money, energy and drive to work towards bigger and better goals.

There’s genuine joy in settling down on a Friday night in fresh bed linen, knowing for certain that you’ll be doing the activities you’ve planned for the weekend. Waking up early, fresh and inspired beats waking up in the wrong place without your money or your dignity.

True friends will be supportive of your desire to better yourself. Having those people contribute to your “average” is just fine. You may well uncover some surprises too. The stand-out gems among your group may not be the people you expect.

As for the others, don’t be afraid to move on. In time, there will be sober friends to swap into your inner circle. Remember, it’s about quality, not quantity.

Another thing that happens in time is that you will feel ready to step back into the social scene. The growing “sober curious” movement means that many bars offer plenty of choice for non-drinkers, so there’s no need to nurse a lime and soda or a Diet Coke all night.

Seeing the night-time “scene” through sober eyes is fascinating. You may well find that you don’t want to be out as late. You can have a couple of non-alcoholic craft beers or sparkling water if you prefer and see everybody until the point that they start arguing and repeating themselves. Then you get to go home early, get cosy, and enjoy the next day while they’re gritting their teeth, full of regret.

Surely that's the best of both worlds?

Friendships provide the perfect example of how going alcohol-free leaves you with fewer relationships but better and deeper ones.

When you make it clear that you've decided where you're going in life, people will either support you on that journey or not.

It's also worth giving some thought to the friend you are, as well as the friends you have. Friendship works both ways, and there's a good chance that not drinking will make you a better friend to the people who matter.

Drunks only really make good friends with other drunks. More broadly, they're often the people who cancel at the last minute, the people who always turn up more focussed on the booze than the occasion, and the people that others fret about whether to invite to the wedding or the christening.

There may even be friends from the past who are ready to welcome you back with open arms. Perhaps you didn't actually "grow apart" from certain people. Perhaps they distanced themselves from you after one too many cancelled meet-ups or careless comments.

If you become a better quality friend, you will attract a better quality of friendships. True friendship is about turning up, being present, and being a reliable source of support. It's not about being "the wildcard" at every social event.

Friendships can become much deeper without the common ground of alcohol.

Intimacy comes from genuine friendship, not from drunkenly sharing secrets with boozy mates and then regretting you did it.

The "sober cull" is very real, but the end result is worth it. Real friends are better than "drinking friends," even if you don't have as many of them!

Sober Dating

Alcohol compromises your judgement, interferes with your decision making, and “causes you to be more reckless”. (NHS).

With that in mind, it seems pretty crazy to go anywhere near it when you’re going on dates! But despite the science, that’s what the vast majority of people do.

It’s understandable that people turn to alcohol in dating situations, which can provoke anxiety in even the most confident people. The trouble is, alcohol often does far more harm than good (and not just in the dating game)!

I’ve been on my fair share of dates where booze has made everything worse. Confidence can morph into arrogance and “chatty” into “mouthy”. The truth is, I am a completely different person when drunk. Having a few beers to “help my confidence” would be enough to turn me into a louder and more foolish version of my true, sober self.

Drunk dating generally goes one of two ways: You can really like the person but show yourself at your worst and ruin it, or end up taking things further with the wrong person because the “beer goggles” become activated!

Dating also shows that paradox where alcohol is socially acceptable, yet frowned upon when you have just a little bit too much of it. Getting “too drunk” on a date is a massive red flag for potential partners.

When you step back from drinking alcohol, dating whilst boozing is one of the things that just seems...mental. Two people with impaired judgement and compromised decision-making capabilities trying to decide whether to take things further. It’s a terrible idea!

If you only meet people when you (and they) are drinking, you’re not meeting the real person. You’re meeting somebody with heightened senses and impaired judgement when you’re suffering from the same things. It’s no wonder people have so many horrific dating stories.

The solution to all of this comes when you give up alcohol. But I’m not going to pretend it’s easy. Going on sober dates is

one of the scariest and most intimidating parts of going alcohol-free. But it's also great for building your own natural confidence.

Dating sober doesn't give you immunity from "car crash" dates. Believe me, it's still a numbers game! However, the rawness and honesty of dating without the crutch of false confidence and jacked up senses gives you a far better chance of meeting the right person. Every rejection or boring date gets you closer to honing in on what you're searching for.

You also needn't worry about your date's impression of you. You're presenting the true, unadulterated, sober version of you. That takes some guts, and the right people will notice and admire that. The people who aren't comfortable, or who think it's "boring" that you're not drinking, are certainly not the right people for you.

It doesn't really matter whether your date chooses to drink alcohol or not. However, a date is a good time to remember the quote from earlier in the chapter: "I used to walk into a room full of people and wonder if they liked me...now I look around and wonder if I like them."

If you've decided not to drink anymore, somebody who drinks "too much" on a first date should probably raise a red flag for you, too.

Once you've been on a couple of sober dates, it all becomes far less intimidating. Instead of building fake confidence with alcohol, you're building genuine confidence without it. Natural confidence is a rather attractive and appealing thing to have.

Best of all is that when you do find "the one", you'll know you made your choice with clarity and sober judgement. And that bodes well for your future.

Before we move on to the next section, a quick warning. It's especially relevant if you have a tendency towards "relationship hopping".

It's common for people to swap an alcohol dependency for a dependency on another person - and often the wrong person.

Codependence is sometimes referred to as “relationship addiction”. Many people drink alcohol or use drugs to fill an emptiness in themselves - one that can also be filled by a relationship.

The best advice to counter this is not to be impatient. After all, happiness is an inside job and when you find your own rhythm in life, the right person will come into your life. Jumping into any relationship for the sake of being in one isn't the recipe for long-term harmony.

With that said, long-term harmony is what we move on to next.

Do You Really Like Your Other Half?

Not everybody who decides to quit drinking is on the dating scene. Many are already in marriages and committed relationships. This can open up a whole can of worms, especially if the relationship was built on boozy foundations.

Just as many dates are fuelled by alcohol, so are many long-term relationships. And just as alcohol forms the rocky foundations of many friendships, it also forms the rocky foundations of plenty of long-term partnerships and even marriages.

The problem here is that you may find that taking alcohol away from a relationship leaves you and your partner with little or nothing in common. If you dated when drinking, got together when drinking, and then spent the weekends, yes, drinking, you may not honestly know the person you're with. And this works both ways - your partner may not honestly know you either.

It's OK, it's not a complete disaster, but deciding to go sober can create some challenges in your marriage or long-term relationship.

Of course, you WILL change when you stop drinking. But you may also find that not drinking vastly improves your relationship. Inevitably, your partner's own relationship with alcohol will play a part in how things shake out.

Perhaps your partner will decide to join in with your sober adventure. This is more common than you might expect. If they are a regular drinker, they may like the idea of having a shot at a better life. If they only drink occasionally, the thought of not drinking probably isn't a big deal to them at all so, again, they may join you for the ride.

If you and your spouse or partner do decide to go sober together, that can be a wonderful thing. You both get to experience all the benefits together: the sober glow, the weight loss, the increasing bank balance, the energy, the drive, the focus, and a whole bunch of other things we've not discussed yet - to the power of two.

These are all ingredients for a relationship that can grow and thrive - all the benefits of giving up drinking and the opportunity to enjoy them together.

But we must be realistic here.

If you've been in a relationship that's dominated by alcohol, with two people using the substance to mask emotions and ignore bigger issues, there could be some challenges ahead.

Plenty of people enjoy a fulfilling partnership where one person drinks and the other chooses not to. But, as an example, a marriage where one person has quit drinking and the other continues to drink to excess could be destined to fail.

No two partnerships are the same. If you're in a committed relationship, you will have more insight into the dynamics of that relationship than anybody else. You will probably be able to predict how much you have to worry about.

If you're a regular drinker, in a relationship with another regular drinker, it's likely that you will "grow apart" to some extent if just one of you quits. You may choose to suggest that you "quit together to stay together".

Whatever you decide, a huge positive of quitting drinking is that you become more confident and secure in yourself, with happiness that's not reliant on anything or anyone. That's a great foundation for making an existing relationship work, or for embarking on a new one.

Booze-Free Bonking

Sober sex has a lot in common with sober dating: perhaps a little terrifying at first, but far more fulfilling, enjoyable and genuine once you're used to it!

The vast majority of drinkers have at least one sexual horror story, from waking up hungover next to the wrong person to coming back from a holiday with a worrying rash. And the reality is those bad sexual decisions can have consequences that go far beyond a sense of shame and a prescription for some cream and antibiotics.

Once you understand the science, it's a struggle to think of two activities that go worse together than drinking alcohol and having sex.

First, there are the physical effects of alcohol. Booze can (and regularly does) cause erectile dysfunction. (Iliades, 2021). For regular drinkers, this can go way beyond a one-off, "don't worry, it happens to all the guys" moment, and progress to an ongoing, recurring problem.

On the female side, alcohol's diuretic and dehydrating effects can mean a lack of lubrication - the distinctly unsexy "vaginal dryness". (Healthline).

No matter what your sexual preferences are, dry vaginas and floppy dicks don't make for memorable sexual experiences. And that's before we even get to alcohol's impact on judgement and decision making.

Aside from the very real risks of unsafe sexual encounters, STIs and unplanned pregnancies, sex when drinking is fraught with risk: The risk of sleeping with somebody you'd never have gone near when sober, and the impact on your self-esteem when you have to look at yourself in the mirror the next day.

The inhibition lowering effect of alcohol is why it's so often used alongside sex. But getting used to "doing it" without alcohol is no different to getting used to the awkward first 20 minutes of a social occasion without alcohol, or the first time

hitting a dancefloor sober (the latter may actually be more intimidating!).

The rewards are big too. It's a huge confidence builder to get used to having sex without being in a boozy haze. It also comes with the added benefit of knowing that you definitely want to be doing it with the person you're doing it with!

Alcohol is primarily a depressant, as we discussed earlier in the book. It's not heightening the sexual experience, it's dulling it. Having fully working genitals is handy too.

Human beings are more than capable of making bad decisions without alcohol. Quitting booze doesn't mean you're guaranteed a lifetime of perfect sexual partners and perfect sexual experiences. However, sex is more enjoyable sober, for both physical and psychological reasons.

Sober sex can help relationships to grow. When you have the courage to "leave the light on" and truly get to know your partner inside and out, you will know that being sober on a drunk planet is FAR from boring.

And, of course, sex isn't merely a way to enjoy yourself - it's also about making babies.

It turns out that booze is not at all helpful there either. Official advice for women trying to conceive is to avoid alcohol completely (Drinkaware). As few as one to five drinks per week can "reduce a woman's chances of conceiving".

Add a male drinker to the mix, and things get even worse, thanks to alcohol "lower(ing) testosterone levels and sperm quality and quantity". It's ironic that excessive drinking is viewed as a "manly" thing to do, when impotence and a low sperm count are seen as "unmanly" attributes.

If becoming a parent is your objective, alcohol may not be helping.

Parenting With Hangovers

Being a boozy parent is a life of never feeling that you're good enough.

Even if you're a "happy drunk", and never lose your temper, break promises or act irrationally, you still tend to feel like you're falling short.

Being a hungover parent is horrific. The headache, the lack of energy and the self-loathing, all combined with a noisy environment and small people who want your attention because - let's be honest - they love you more than anything in the world.

Feeling you're not giving them your best adds to the guilt and anxiety, and then your jumpiness, headache and lack of patience means you snap at them. Then you're back at the guilt part of the cycle again.

Maybe they were misbehaving and needed a telling off, but it doesn't change the fact that you feel like the world's worst human. You tell yourself, "never again".

But then, after the bedtime routine takes two and a half hours, you're so frazzled you open the wine. And the cycle begins once more.

All of this is bad enough, even if you don't drink to a degree where your actions put your children at risk of harm or distress. It can all get very serious indeed, with evidence stating that "children of alcoholics are at a significant risk for a variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural problems (MentalHelp.net)".

Something you hear over and over again in all the sober communities is, "I'm so much more PRESENT with my kids now."

Parenthood is incredibly hard. Children can be loud. Children can be irrational, unpredictable and argumentative. Children WILL push boundaries and rob you of your sleep and your sanity.

All parents have a unique understanding of the fact you can simultaneously love somebody more than anyone else on earth and find them profoundly, tear-your-own-hair-out infuriating!

But those who choose to be sober on a drunk planet usually come to realise that their children are part of the solution and

not part of the problem. It suddenly clicks that they don't need a drink to "take the edge" off a stressful day before dealing with the kids. They find out that, sometimes, what lifts that stressful day is the hug, the unconditional love, or the random quirky outburst they would have hated to miss.

Let's not pretend this is easy. Parenting presents challenges to your finances, your mental health, your sleep, your daily routine, and your ability to relax. But, the thing is, alcohol doesn't help with ANY of those things. In fact, it makes all of those problems worse. If drinking regularly is "living life on hard mode", parenting while drinking needs a difficulty level all of its own. It's little wonder that having children is often something that causes people to reassess their relationship with alcohol.

No child is going to grow up and tell you that you were a better parent because you were drinking all the time. All of alcohol's detrimental effects can feed into outcomes that are bad for your children - not least the risk of you being around for less of their lives.

The rewards of deciding to be a sober parent are many. Children thrive on attention, and on having parents who are fully present with them. You may even find that they put you through the ringer just a little less, in return for your greater sense of focus!

Either way, the only thing that beats being able to look in the mirror and see a good person is to look in the mirror and see a good parent. That's something money can't buy.

Sobering Family Dynamics

One final relationship dynamic we've not yet covered is the one with your wider family.

Just as some friendship groups revolve around alcohol, so do some families - brothers and sisters, parents and their adult children, and even all the aunts, uncles and cousins.

Holidays? Alcohol. Weddings? Alcohol. Anything to celebrate or commiserate? Alcohol. Many family occasions are ruined

by the drunken behaviour of one or more family members. In some households, it's practically a tradition.

The damage alcohol does to extended families can compound over time. Individual incidents build into long-term resentments and get raked up over and over again. But it doesn't have to be that way.

It's unrealistic to expect your entire family to give up drinking just because you decide to. However, you may be pleasantly surprised by the example you can set. Either way, interacting with your family with clarity can only be a good thing, as can ensuring you actually turn up for events, rather than cancelling - yet again - because you're too hungover.

Even if you're part of a hard-drinking family, knowing that YOU won't be the next to create a bitter, drunken memory is liberating. It allows you to relax and enjoy your family's company. And if you're spending a few days with them, you can enjoy all of those days, not just one big night followed by three days of headaches, guilt and recrimination.

You will probably come up with some resistance from family, especially if all they have known is that occasions are centred around alcohol. You might get asked "why you can't just have one drink" but like those friends you need to assess, if your family get too pushy, just spend more time with people who don't question it.

Remember, this decision is for YOU to give up alcohol and live a life that is better than a life where alcohol was impacting negatively on it. No family member should get in the way of that or make you feel like you have let them down because you aren't conforming to their "normal".

Not only will your family learn to respect your decisions as they see a new and vastly improved version of your former self, but you will be able to turn up for your family when they need help.

Time and time again, I would cancel family events because I was too hungover or I was out on the session, yet again. Being a valued member of your family, where they know they can

rely on you, trust you and ask for your help, is one of the best parts of sobriety!

All those years where Mum and Dad looked after Drunk Sean, in his many drunken states, can now be repaid through Sober Sean and his ability to be fully present and reliable.

When you drink (and drug), every weekend, you never worry about anyone around you. You never think about how much you might be impacting your loved ones, while they see you suffer, weekend after weekend. Getting sober allows you to see the hurt you caused and fix it by giving up alcohol.

Actions speak louder than words.

If you have been “missing in action” for a number of years, they will still hold their perceptions of the drunken version of you. Based on how you acted. That’s normal. Their perceptions will only change through sustained action i.e. staying sober, not through anything you say to them because they have heard it all before.

The “sober glow” is something that families see more clearly than any others. They are the ones that have raised you, seen you at your best, your worst and then when you get sober. They notice the sober awakening as much as you do.

The one thing guaranteed is that quitting drinking won’t make your family relationships worse. The chances are it will help them grow positively in a way you have never experienced before.

Next, we move on to the most important relationship of all: the one you have with yourself.

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CHAPTER 4

The Compound Effect of Being Sober

Earlier, we looked at the vicious circle of being drunk, hungover, broke, low...and then doing it all over again. It's the path I trod for years.

By the end, I was a zombie. But long before that, I became a passenger rather than a driver in my own life. Regular drinkers are great at talking - often repeatedly - about all the things they want to achieve. They're not very good at achieving them.

It's easy to kid yourself that you're "achieving" because you're making it through each year without getting fired from work. But that's doing what you have to do, not what you could be doing.

Let's look at how much time you are losing to hangovers.

Hangovers Cost Time

It doesn't help that hangovers destroy potential. People don't throw themselves into new ideas and projects when hungover - they throw themselves onto the sofa.

We've already covered alcohol's various negative "feedback loops". They lead to low energy, poor physical and mental health, a scary bank balance, and non-existent self-esteem. It's a life of "living for the weekend" - and sleep-walking painfully through the rest of each week.

It gets terrifying when you add up the time you lose.

Let's say you spend just three days per week going out, planning to go out, and recovering from going out (hungover). In my case, and in many others, that's a drastic underestimation.

Those three days per week add up to 156 days each year - every year.

There's an enormous amount you can do with that time: learning, reading, exploring the world, and working on areas of your life you want to improve, such as your fitness and self-care.

Just as drinking regularly has a compound effect that makes your life worse and worse, not drinking has a compound effect that makes it better and better. Instead of feeling increasingly hollow, frustrated and glum, you begin to feel more inspired, energetic and positive.

In the introduction, I mentioned the quote that "sobriety delivers everything alcohol promised". The time you get back when you free yourself from drinking plays a huge part in making that true.

Think about how you start a new year with lots of objectives: "I want to read that book / lose that weight / do that course / learn that workout / create that art / take up yoga / explore that place". All too often, drinkers not only fail to achieve those things, but they also have to deal with the frustration and reduced self-esteem that comes from not achieving them.

Meanwhile, the non-drinkers, with the luxury of 156 or more "extra days" each year, are getting all of it done, and more.

Shortly after quitting drinking, you begin to feel better - physically, mentally and emotionally - and it continues to build with time.

A few weeks in, as most people who try Dry January will confirm, you have a new energy for life and start to realise how much more time you have without hangovers. Unfortunately, the people who celebrate the end of Dry January with a massive session (before going straight back to their old ways) don't realise that the best was yet to come.

The compound effect of choosing to be sober every day, compared to being hungover for half the week, is INCREDIBLY powerful in transforming your life. Anonymous groups talk about "just for today" and the power of just focusing your effort on being sober for 24 hours. But when you do that repeatedly for weeks, months and years, you

see all the amazing achievements you have gained along the way.

The “Life Coach Effect”

The “Life Coach Effect” is something I’ve witnessed in the sober community. Lots of people who quit drinking go on to be life coaches, personal trainers, therapists or yoga teachers.

To begin with, I hated seeing all of those “self-righteous” people preaching about how much better life is when sober. I left plenty of AA meetings and online sober communities thinking, “what a bunch of w**kers!”

But then I started to get more sober time under my belt and started to believe in myself - for what felt like the first time in my life.

I subsequently left the corporate world, started my own business, re-trained as a life coach, qualified as a strength & conditioning coach and trained to be a counsellor and yoga instructor! I guess I’m now one of those w**kers! But, joking aside, the energy needed to qualify in all of those new careers and combine them into a business that lets me live an amazing life is all down to the power of sobriety.

When you discover something good, you want others to experience it too, especially when it’s the kind of genuine contentment you spent years trying to find. That’s the “Life Coach Effect” in action. My love for exercise and how it helped me change as a person, is why I get up at 5 am every morning to help others get stronger and fitter.

The reason why I mention the “Life Coach Effect” is that you see, time and time again, incredible transformations from people getting sober that leads them to wake up with purpose and drive. Something they never thought possible until they got sober.

If you are looking for a complete overhaul and want to join the growing list of sober coaches who become Personal Trainers, Life Coaches, Yoga Instructors and so on, giving up alcohol could be the missing ingredient.

While I love my job now, getting sober was difficult and transitioning careers was hard work. But when you have given up alcohol and drugs, in a world obsessed by it all, you feel as though you've acquired a "superpower". A superpower that makes you believe in yourself and that anything is possible.

The insane drive and energy you get from being consistently sober (that compound effect again) is what fuels the "Life Coach Effect" and helps create incredible transformations.

When you put an intense amount of positive energy and drive in turning an area of your life around, without hangovers and guilt getting in the way, you can transform those areas very quickly. Life projects that looked years away, are suddenly achieved in a couple of months.

Maybe your life has got so boring, that you are willing to give anything a go. Giving up alcohol could be the kick up the arse you need to start your own transformation, whether its physical, mental, a change of career or a complete overhaul in all areas of your life.

I wouldn't be where I was, by doing it all on my own. Getting help and letting people in was a big part of my journey. This is where we go to next.

Asking For Help

If you're serious about personal growth (and with only one life, you probably should be), it's well worth thinking about seeing a therapist or at least doing some work on understanding why alcohol became such a big part of your life.

It wasn't all plain sailing when I got sober and I needed a lot of outside help to unravel why I was drinking so heavily in the first place. Being an addict isn't the answer to my problems; addiction was a temporary band-aid for deeper rooted problems.

Alcohol and drugs were used to numb the pain. So when I did get sober I needed a lot of support to understand who I really was.

Alcohol blocks your emotions. Beginning to understand yourself and your emotions whilst sober can be daunting and new. Many people do what I did and embark on their adult life with alcohol as a crutch. That can mean you've not yet tried to live as an adult in a raw and "unassisted" state.

It's rather like being a newborn baby, seeking to understand the world for the very first time. That can be tough to deal with alone. Counsellors/Therapists/Coaches can help, and so can Anonymous groups (more on those in a bit) and online communities.

Spending time in rehab and going through the 12 step programme helped me to come to terms with the fact that I'd not gone a week without drinking or drugging since the age of 15. How could I ever know who I was if my default was to use alcohol or drugs to manage my emotions?

When something became difficult, I would activate my "f**k it" button and go "out-out". Nothing ever got resolved. Instead, I swept my growing list of problems under the carpet, choosing to self-medicate with alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, and anything else I could distract myself with.

Having finally landed in rehab, after 17 years of avoiding my emotions, I was slapped in the face by the fact I had to work through them rather than carry on ignoring them. I had to build the emotional intelligence I'd neglected since my teenage years.

For me personally, regular counselling when I gave up alcohol saved my life (thanks again Patrick!). Having been a "typical" male, whose emotions were in deep space somewhere, being able to be honest and open about my life was completely transformational. It was a skill I'd never used before but the relief you feel when you tell a complete stranger how you ACTUALLY feel is amazing.

Working through challenges in your head and in your life with someone trained to help you in that particular area, has changed my outlook on coaching forever.

You will see INSANE levels of growth if you choose the right coach, whether they are a sober coach, personal trainer,

counsellor, business coach, sex coach and so on. Getting sober allowed me to see the value in getting others to help, where you pay them for their experience, which ultimately saves you time, money and frustration.

Asking for help when you give up the booze might sound like an admission of weakness but I can assure you that it's the strongest action I have ever taken. You might be an emotional mess when you take away your favourite "medicine", but opening up to someone trained to guide you to a better life is certainly something I highly recommend.

Even scarier, but just as liberating, is telling a group of strangers how you feel! Attending Anonymous group meetings, I would be scared, frightened, angry, sad, happy, and that's before the meeting even started. But once the meeting took place, you really do feel a sense of serenity. The fact that you hear others going through the same challenges as you, is incredibly comforting and provides you with a sense of relief.

The 12-step programme is like a spiritual personal growth tool kit. If you need the support of the fellowship, then the 12-step programme will help you towards becoming a better person.

Going to Anonymous meetings was as much about personal growth as seeing my counsellor, personal trainer and reading up on self-development. Everything was incredibly uncomfortable but I soon realised that nothing grows in the comfort zone and all these experiences were making me more resilient as a person.

Even meeting up with new sober friends that I met on Instagram seemed a rather alien experience but one that I wouldn't have bothered with if I was hungover and not looking for a better way of life.

The reason I mention these things is that personal growth is a huge part of learning to be sober on a drunk planet. It's at once both exciting and terrifying which is a world away from the monotony of drinking, drugging, hangover, regret and repeat.

If it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you.

Giving up alcohol challenges you ALOT, especially on this drunk planet. But you soon build up a resistance to it and a new life you can be proud of.

Alcohol-Free Achievements

Many people planning to quit drinking worry about being “bored”. Instead of feeling inspired and excited by the thought of around 156 extra days each year, they feel terrified by the prospect.

I can assure you that that feeling doesn’t last. Once you start to tick off achievements, both large and small, you will soon wish you had more spare days.

Facing life head-on is scary, but living a sober life teaches you true resilience. Every time you achieve something without the “aid” of alcohol, you build a tiny extra brick of self-confidence. Those bricks build solid, real, unshakable foundations.

The more established those foundations become, the more you begin to believe in yourself, and the more willing you are to embark on the “big stuff”.

All you have to do is identify things that interest you: read, take courses, listen to books on Audible - just take whatever steps you need to bring you closer to things you want. You can do literally anything.

Sure, sober life can be boring if you stubbornly refuse to do anything. But every time you open your computer, you have access to the entirety of the world’s knowledge. You can, right now, learn music production, gourmet cooking, boxing, tantric sex, web design, pilates, creative writing, programming, a foreign language....the list goes on.

Once again, you have just one life. No child, when asked what they “want to be when they grow up”, says a drinker.

One of the many wonderful things about quitting drinking is that you get to go back to that basic question. All of those extra days allow you to do the things you truly want to.

It may take you some time to work out what those things are, especially if you've been so absorbed in the drinking lifestyle that you've forgotten how to dream. But that's OK.

It's exciting - and all of the mental and physical health benefits of being booze-free give you the energy and clarity to feel that excitement. Yet again, it's another feedback loop, but a really rewarding one.

Personal growth means different things to different people, but it's almost certain that - in time - it will boil down to specific goals.

When I managed to stay clean and sober, I had just one goal: to get myself out of my corporate setting and find a job that I actually liked! I noticed a real "snowball effect" after that, with bigger, better and more ambitious goals. I can assure you it never gets boring.

When you start achieving goals, nothing can stop the new virtuous circle. More goals ticked off means more confidence, which means you're more likely to try (and succeed) at the next thing. It's truly mind-blowing when you can look back at a single year, having achieved a whole bunch of plans that you'd spent over a decade making zero progress on.

Let's turn briefly back to the alternative, which we ran through at the start of this book: a circle of nights out, hangovers, low moods, neglected plans and abandoned dreams.

You have a choice of which circle you want to continue in, and that takes us back to something I said right at the start: Giving up drinking doesn't mean giving up something good - it's simply swapping one kind of life for a better one. And you don't meet people in sobriety who wish for their old life back.

In the next chapter, we continue to talk about personal growth, this time on the spiritual side.

We've already covered having better health, more money, better relationships and more success, but what if you could also experience happiness on a deeper level than ever before? And what if that was on offer to you whether or not you believe in any kind of God or religion?

It's time to talk about spirituality.

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CHAPTER 5

The Sober Awakening

Living for the weekend makes for a grim existence. But it's an existence many people fall into and settle for.

Life can get very repetitive, especially if you're working in a job you don't enjoy, sticking with it purely because you can turn up hungover and still get paid. A life designed around "making it through" the day or the week, until you can have a beer or a glass of wine, is soulless and empty.

It's important not to blame yourself if that's what your life looks like. We're all conditioned to think it's normal, hence "happy hour" and "wine o'clock". But there are 365 days in a year, and only 104 of them are weekend days. Is it not worth learning to relish the other 261?

My life during the 12 years I spent in the corporate world was boring and predictable: Get up, go to work, have lunch, watch the clock run down from 2 pm till 5 pm (when time appeared to almost stop), and then make a quick exit - either home or to a bar.

My main aims were to get through the day having done some work and to get through the year having done enough to get paid a bonus.

That bonus paid for some "things", which did nothing to nourish my soul. They just allowed me to pretend I was momentarily happy with my life. It was a very soulless existence. I used alcohol and drugs to numb the pain of how boring and soulless it actually was.

We're conditioned to believe that material things (like those purchased with my annual bonus) can fill the void. But if that were true, there wouldn't be any unhappy rich people!

The "living for the weekend" lifestyle is the same as the "rat race" lifestyle. There's little genuine difference between somebody grafting on minimum wage to pay for a couple of

nights in their local pub and a stockbroker working all week and “celebrating” with champagne, caviar and cocaine. It comes down to little more than pricier drugs and glitzier venues.

I did my time in the corporate world. But after a couple of years of sobriety, I felt a strong urge to move on to something different. I was in a position where I could get the “things:” the bigger house, the bigger car. All I needed to do was work longer hours, get more stressed, and burn myself out every few months.

But however much of it I did, the work still left me feeling empty. Giving up alcohol allowed me to see the light and understand that the corporate world didn’t feed my soul.

What is Spirituality?

Let’s take a look at the dictionary definition of spirituality:

Spirituality: “the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things (Oxford Languages)”.

Note that the definition says nothing about any God. Whether you’re a devout believer or an atheist, you have a soul that is either nourished or neglected. And neither alcohol nor material things feed the soul.

The “work hard, play hard” lifestyle that so many people pride themselves on doesn’t nourish the soul. It comes down to something as simple as the fact that money can’t buy happiness - and neither can bigger houses, faster cars and expensive holidays.

“Work hard, play hard” is the perfect lifestyle for people who want to burn themselves out and live increasingly materialistic lives. None of it has any correlation with happiness and contentment.

Alcohol has a stronger connection to all of this than it might initially appear. Alcohol (and other drugs) can make you a passive participant in the rat race. If Monday to Friday are about doing the job and making money, and Saturday and

Sunday are about dulling and forgetting the monotony of it all, how is anything going to change?

Giving up alcohol creates the space for things to change. It breaks the cycle and allows you to think about what “being concerned with the human spirit or soul” could mean for you - with or without a God.

A balanced and contented life requires you to think about three things: mind, body and soul. You can think of them as three cups you need to keep full.

All too often, people think only about the first two cups. They concentrate on trying to look good and “be the best” (mind and body) and forget all about the soul. Materialism is a big part of this, too. Many people (wrongly) assume that looking and being “the best” is about the size of the house, the job title, or where they go on holiday.

Part of becoming sober on a drunk planet is waking up to this and realising that the third cup is equally important. It doesn't matter how many zeroes you have on your bank balance if you're numb to the beauty of the world around you and are neglecting your soul. You will still be miserable.

Spirituality means different things to different people. For some, it's all about connecting with nature. For others, it's about a constant quest for learning and self-improvement. Some people feed their soul by volunteering, helping others and campaigning about things they care about. Others find profound peace in activities like yoga and meditation. And, yes, for some, it's about religion.

Spiritual Solutions For Soulless Existences

Now is a good moment to speak a little about Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programmes. I should emphasise that AA doesn't appeal to everybody, but - for many - it plays a huge part in the spiritual side of getting sober.

The 12 steps were truly transformative for me and changed my perspective on life. It's no exaggeration to describe it as a spiritual awakening.

Alcoholics Anonymous was started in 1935 by a stockbroker (Bill Wilson) and a surgeon (Dr Bob Smith). Both had developed a serious dependence on alcohol.

Since the 12 step programme that formed the basis of AA's "spiritual approach to recovery", it has expanded into all kinds of other addictions. We now have Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous and many more.

The "spiritual" nature of the 12 step programme does cause some misunderstandings. Mentions of "God" and a "higher power" lead some people to (incorrectly) see AA as a religious group. Alcoholics Anonymous themselves emphasise that this is not the case. (Alcoholics Anonymous).

While AA "has its origins in a Christian group," the program is spiritual and not religious. Plenty of diverse individuals, including Buddhists, atheists and agnostics, take part in (and benefit hugely from) 12 step programmes.

The 12 steps lead you through - among other things - admitting you have a problem, having faith in a "power greater than yourself", taking a moral inventory, righting your wrongs, and helping others going through similar journeys.

Millions of people enjoy the process of "working the steps" methodically. However, there's no obligation to do that. As per AA's own guidelines, "newcomers are not asked to accept or follow these Twelve Steps in their entirety if they feel unwilling or unable to do so."

If you feel f**ked and feel that your soul needs a reboot, 12 step programmes have helped millions of people around the world. If you're truly f**ked, like I was, you should be willing to give anything a try. Anonymous groups are a great place to do some soul-searching.

There's absolutely nothing stopping you from testing the water. Online meetings are widespread, so you can do so without even leaving your home, if you prefer. If you want greater insight into the 12-step programme, Russell Brand's "Recovery" provides a great introduction to each of the 12 steps.

While the whole “higher power” thing is a struggle for some, it completely changed how I viewed the world.

I will explain briefly what “higher power” means to me because it has saved me a lot of stress and allowed me to grow as a person.

Acknowledging a “higher power” means understanding that you can only control what you can actually control. Anything outside of that needs to be left to a “higher power”, in whatever form that takes for you. It could mean fate, God, the universe, or any interpretation you choose. It could be as straightforward as acknowledging that there’s a whole bunch of stuff you personally have no power over.

Failing to accept that there’s a higher power leads you to try to control situations that are out of your control. This can cause nothing other than frustration and anger since you have no power over the final outcome. It’s simply “banging your head against a brick wall”.

Many people assume “higher power” means God. While that is what the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous had in mind originally, the organisation has evolved. People from all walks of life take part, and they have all kinds of different beliefs. So don’t let that misapprehension put you off from giving the 12 steps a go.

Alcohol and drugs changed the person I was. Sober Sean is not the same person as Drunk Sean. The 12 steps enabled me to realise that and recognise my patterns. Most importantly, they allowed me to forgive myself and move beyond that old self.

Other people forgave me too. Daunting though it felt to begin with, apologising to the people I’d hurt (the ninth step) was the most rewarding part of all, and key to moving forward into my new life. I won’t, however, try to deny that it was one of the scariest things I’ve ever done.

There’s no other way to describe it than as a spiritual moment. Everything I learned when completing the 12 steps finally made “the penny drop”, and helped me understand my addiction and how alcohol was linked to all my bad decisions.

As I said, the 12 steps aren't for everyone - but they were a huge part of my own journey. Your journey needn't be the same as mine.

There are plenty of other lessons you can learn away from 12 step programmes. Perhaps you will find your soul in music, in charitable work, or in yoga and meditation.

Going back to what we said at the start of this chapter, you're going to free up a whole bunch of time to discover what makes your spirit sing, so why not try everything that sparks your interest?

There were a couple of big lessons I learned, away from the structure of Anonymous groups: Something just as transformative as the 12 steps was learning about the role of the ego, and the part it plays in your life.

I highly recommend reading (or listening to) "A New Earth", by Eckhart Tolle - a book that I place firmly in my "life-changing" category.

Anybody who's walked down a rowdy high street on a Friday night will know that alcohol and ego don't always make for a great mix. Alcohol can vastly inflate the ego, and consuming it regularly - especially on a drunk and materialistic planet - can quickly send things spinning out of control.

Getting sober, and absorbing that book, allowed me to finally understand the role of my ego, and begin to work with it in a healthy way, rather than letting it control my life.

Learning the power of being present (essentially "living in the moment") was also a huge part of my sobriety journey.

When you regularly drink or take drugs, it's practically impossible to live in the moment. This is ironic, given how much we convince ourselves that's what "partying" is all about.

In reality, you spend a lot of time in the past, "What did I do? What did I say? How much did I spend?" and in the future, "How am I going to get through work with this hangover? How will I tell the landlord I've spent the rent? What time can I start drinking again?".

Using alcohol and drugs made my life constantly chaotic, and you can't be present in chaos. My mind was constantly worrying about the past and future. That's an exhausting way to live.

Getting sober allowed me to learn about being present - not looking back or forward, merely enjoying the now.

You'll have no problem finding lots of material on mindfulness and being present. It's a fashionable subject, and it deserves its popularity because it's hugely powerful when you master it. I highly recommend Eckhart Tolle's "The Power of Now", another book that changed my life and allowed my mind to finally stop overthinking.

I can't talk about spirituality without a mention of yoga and meditation, both of which are widely seen as spiritual practices.

Yoga is very much a "mind, body and spirit" practice, said to "create mental clarity and calmness, increase body awareness, relieve chronic stress patterns, relax the mind, centre attention and sharpen concentration". (American Osteopathic Association).

Like attending Alcoholics Anonymous, doing yoga is probably something that either inspires you or makes you think, "nope, no chance". But it's worth knowing that an estimated 300 million people practice yoga worldwide. (The Good Body). It seems unlikely that all those individuals are doing it and getting nothing out of it.

The reason why people do yoga, isn't just to look great and move into stupidly named poses such as pigeon, dolphin or happy baby. It's incredibly cleansing for your mind too.

Focusing on your yoga practice, while trying your best to hold those poses and move through your flow, means your mind is not thinking about other things. You can only concentrate on the present moment. That involves trying not to fall over, pull a muscle or worse, fart in a crowded yoga studio.

If you have never tried it, give yoga a go because you can help your mind, body and soul all at once!

Once again, not drinking gives you lots of time to try these things out and the mental clarity to approach them with an open mind.

The same applies to meditation. Again, it's a spiritual practice that hundreds of millions of people enjoy. Even if you're not (yet) sold on the soulful side of things, the 84% of people who practise meditation "to reduce stress and anxiety" can't all be wasting their time. (FinancesOnline).

Nobody's saying you have to do any of these things. Your spiritual journey is yours alone. But these are things that have not just worked for me but are widely praised by those who get sober.

It's not a binary choice. It's not about either being a party animal or swapping it all for a yoga mat and wardrobe full of lycra. Nor is it about turning your back on money and status and becoming a "spiritual being".

Remember those three cups labelled "mind," "body" and "soul". It doesn't matter how you choose to fill them. And there's nothing wrong with aspiring to be rich and fit or a powerful CEO with a nourished soul!

Just remember not to neglect that third cup.

While you may be inspired by some of the things I did to "fill that cup", part of the fun of sobriety is working out what does it for you. Maybe it could be running marathons, buying some turntables and learning to DJ, or volunteering at an animal shelter.

Finding out what "moves you" in a life free from alcohol and drugs can be a lot of fun. And fun is what we talk about next. You have lots of it to come.

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CHAPTER 6

Sober NOT Boring

Going out drinking is a pretty weird kind of fun.

You go out and drink (because, well, that's what people do), but the price of that big night out is two or three days of feeling rough - perhaps longer, if you're advancing in years. You also, as we've already discussed, have to deal with the financial cost of that night out.

So, that "good night out" is defined by spending a load of money, only remembering patches of the evening, and then feeling like sh*t (mentally and physically) for days after.

That's supposed to be FUN?!

The trouble is, we live on a drunk planet. Using alcohol to have fun is a societal thing. We live in a world with a drinking "culture" (although "culture" seems like a rather grand word for something so daft).

Society expects you to have "fun" by going out and drinking. Billions are spent on alcohol advertising to keep the "culture" thriving.

It's not your fault if you don't understand how to have fun without alcohol. Boozing is seen as something you're finally allowed to do when you reach adulthood. We're practically conditioned to forget the thousands of other ways of enjoying ourselves.

The conditioning runs deep, and it's why not drinking is sometimes seen as "boring". Some people may even call you "boring" if you decide to stop conforming to the drinking culture. (We've already covered what to do about that in the chapter on relationships).

To begin with, alcohol does provide a little bit of superficial fun. It lowers your inhibitions and gives you a boost of confidence. You may even like the taste of it (although I never really did).

The trouble is that the fun stops, and when it stops it really stops: blackouts, crippling expensive nights out, battered mental and physical health, and the impact of all the bad decisions that go with drinking - such as drug-taking, gambling, promiscuity and awful food.

The truly crazy part is that millions of people carry on drinking, even when they've seen and lived through those impacts time and time again.

It shows just how ingrained the culture is. We come to accept that fun has all of those undesirable consequences - and potentially far worse ones. We all know about Amy Winehouse, Oliver Reed, Billie Holiday, Avicci, Heath Ledger and many more. The end-game is there for us to see - but we carry on anyway.

Fortunately, sober fun doesn't have those consequences.

Redefining “Fun”

Just as quitting drinking frees up masses of time to feed your soul, it frees up time for fun too. Often, the two things merge. If fun, for you, means flying to an exciting destination and climbing a mountain, chances are that will nourish your spirit too.

But not everything you do has to have a spiritual point. It's your time - so do exactly as you please with it.

As with so many of the benefits of quitting drinking, it's not only about the time and money you save from the drinking itself. Hangovers aren't fun. Weekends can be about actually having the fun rather than sleeping it off.

As your “sober time” builds, so too does your confidence. Things that seem intimidating when you're shaky, aching and smelling like a pub aren't intimidating when you've woken up fresh and know you'd pass a breathalyser test. Maybe you can book the skydive, strap yourself to a snowboard, or pluck up the courage to go to that Muay Thai class.

When you start branching out and doing these things, you quickly realise that there are many other people doing them

too. You begin to notice that there's a whole parallel world of other people - who weren't out last night and aren't nursing hangovers.

As soon as you have your first "brilliant day" or "great night" that didn't involve a drop of alcohol, you begin to understand that that whole world is open to you. It's exciting, and it further boosts your confidence.

Natural confidence is worlds apart from the short-lived, artificial confidence you get from a few shots or a couple of lines of cocaine. You get to think about what you really fancy doing, go out and do it, and go home whenever you want.

That leads us neatly on to sober socialising, something that every ex-drinker must learn to navigate on a drunk planet.

Sober Socialising, Hobbies & Holidays

Let's start with a huge positive: an exciting world of no and low alcohol drinks has emerged in the past five years. It's an industry now worth nearly US\$10 Billion - and growing. (IWSR).

What this means is that you can still have a good night out with plenty of "grown-up" drinks: alcohol-free craft beers, cocktails and even some palatable 0% wines. You can go out with people who choose to drink, have four or five drinks with them, and still be up first thing for whatever fun activity you have planned.

Equally, if you don't want to drink alcohol-related drinks, like me, there is nothing more powerful, than drinking a glass of water.

The increasing popularity of the "sober curious" movement means that you may not even find yourself explaining your reasons for not drinking. People may not notice. But being realistic, you probably will have "the conversation" plenty of times. It gets easier on each occasion, and ultimately people can either accept your desire for a better life or not. If you're not comfortable talking about why you are giving up alcohol just yet, use something like, "I'm training for the next Olympics" or "I can't handle another psychotic outburst in

public again”. The latter is likely to stop any further questions as well.

If you do socialise with people who are drinking, you may decide to leave earlier than them or to skip the club. Don't fret. They probably won't care at the time, and by the time they're nursing a hangover, the only feeling they will have is one of envy for not making the same choices as you!

While they're bathing in self-regret and piecing together the evening before, you can be out and enjoying whatever pastimes, sports and hobbies make you happy. These can be things that appealed to you before you started drinking or something entirely new.

If, for example, you played a sport or had a hobby before you started spending most weekends drunk or hungover, take it up again and try it sober. You'll likely find you're much better at it!

You can do whatever you want: yoga, meditation, knitting, reading, developing a side hustle, starting a business, writing a novel, learning an instrument, building new friendships. When you decide to stay sober on a drunk planet, you get to redefine what fun means and start living life on your terms, not your friends, family, workmates or by societal “norms”.

Giving up alcohol allows you to become the driver and not the passenger on your own journey to having fun.

If improved fitness is a part of your plan, you will find out the gym is actually open on Saturdays and Sundays (a fact that passes many regular drinkers by!). Being sober allows you to spend more time on exercise, burn more calories and really benefit from your newfound zest for life.

There's no obligation to make fitness one of your new hobbies when you quit drinking. However, finding regular exercise that you enjoy can be one of the best things about sobriety. There are plenty of choices, so you're sure to find something that appeals, and it helps to maximise the feeling of wellbeing.

Once you begin to understand the true meaning of self-care, you see what “relaxing” truly means. What it doesn't mean is

going out drinking and then feeling like crap for the next few days.

That's not fun. Fun is doing the things you enjoy and are passionate about, without having to pay for them physically, emotionally and mentally.

Another enjoyable part of being sober is taking sober holidays. Yes, they're very different, but imagine going on holiday and coming back re-energised and with a new

enthusiasm for life - rather than being broke, tired and needing another holiday to get over it all.

Again, for most people, drinking alcohol doesn't equal true relaxation. Being hungover, skint and full of regret isn't relaxing. "Writing off" one or more days of a long-awaited holiday because you're cowering in your hotel room feeling sick and headachey is a terrible way to spend your time off.

I've been on plenty of holidays, but most were "wasted" in more ways than one! I've done lots of "18-30" style trips, including those to Ibiza, Spring Break in Cancun and the Greek islands. If you haven't drunk a fishbowl of lethal cocktail and had the ten free shots that came with it, count yourself as lucky.

Regardless of the destination, I'd repeat the same pattern. I'd go on a "massive one" on the first night and be violently sick thanks to my inability to stomach too much alcohol. I'd then spend the remaining days alternating between suffering and trying to do it all again. Looking back to those alcohol-fuelled holidays, being hungover for 7-days wasn't much "fun".

Making the most of every moment is much better. Exploring the local sites is a better use of time than searching for an open pharmacy to buy some painkillers. Holiday time is precious time, whether it's time by yourself or time with your nearest and dearest. Wasting it on hangovers is a bit tragic.

A holiday can be anything you want it to be: time to completely switch off and work through a pile of books, time to discover every hidden corner of a new city or time to

indulge in hobbies and try new things. If all a holiday is time to hammer booze and drugs, you may as well stay at home.

Learning to have sober fun can take some time. The people you surround yourself with can play a big part in how easy it is. Joining some kind of sober community is a great way to do fun things with like-minded people.

There are plenty of communities out there where you can find your tribe. If you're an Instagram fan, it's well worth following related hashtags and accounts - for ideas and inspiration, and perhaps even to find some people on your wavelength.

As a starting point, look out for anyone with a username like sober(name) or a #sober(something) hashtag. If you want to remain anonymous to your drinking pals, then just start up your own sober account.

Facebook has plenty of online groups as well if Instagram is a bit too much and more and more sober communities are popping up as increasing numbers of people become sober on a drunk planet.

I'm going to end this chapter by reemphasising two things:

1. You can have a huge amount of fun when you're sober.
2. Being sober does NOT mean that any aspect of your life will be boring.

I can honestly say that I've never met anybody who has regretted turning sober. A life filled with hobbies, passions and interests is rewarding and - yes - fun.

If you're in any doubt about this, try to think back to your childhood, before a drop of alcohol had passed your lips. Almost certainly, you will have had hobbies, interests, and things you would have loved to try doing.

As a sober adult, you have the time, the freedom and the money to do them all. If that's not fun, I don't know what is!

Next, we talk about something that - to many - isn't much fun at all: business and careers. One of the many exciting things

about living a sober existence is that you can make your working life something you enjoy rather than endure. Imagine enjoying the 261 weekdays of each year as well as making the most of every single weekend. It's yet another life-changing benefit of giving up alcohol.

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CHAPTER 7

The Sober Worker

There are some horrifying statistics out there around how many people hate (or merely tolerate) their jobs. One global poll found that 85% of people are “not engaged” by their work (Clifton, 2017).

There have been many studies around this, and while not all of them create such a staggering headline, most show that a solid majority of people are dissatisfied with their working lives.

However you look at it, that’s pretty depressing. Accounting for holidays and weekends, most of us spend well over 200 days working each year. It’s one hell of a waste of your adult life if you’re miserable for those days.

Why do so many people tolerate a life like that? A big part of it is that we live on a drunk planet.

A never-ending cycle of alcohol-fuelled weekends followed by lethargic, hungover weeks robs you of the ability to make the best use of your working time.

In the chapter on spirituality, we talked about the “work hard, play hard” lifestyle, also known as the “rat race”. Not only is it the cultural norm for many, but it’s also a trap.

If you go out every weekend and live paycheck to paycheck, you have little option but to tolerate the job you’re in. “Rising up the ranks” doesn’t solve the problem, because your lifestyle tends to expand to match your salary.

There are plenty of people out there on huge salaries who are still stuck in jobs they hate - due to things like big mortgages, car payments and school fees. That’s what happens when you live a materialistic life and are always chasing after the next “thing”.

The rat race still traps people who don’t drink alcohol. If you are a regular drinker, you’re not giving yourself even a tiny

chance - least of all for all the financial reasons discussed earlier in the book.

Here's what happens when you try to juggle a job with a party lifestyle: You may well hate the job, but you tolerate it. You spend the weekends bitching and moaning about work, passionately believing that you're "worth more to the business" and that your bonus should be higher.

But then Monday comes around and you're back at your desk. You're far too jaded and hungover to do anything other than stay on the hamster wheel. You need the money and they're paying you to endure your hangover on a weekday, so it can't be all bad, right?

It IS bad. It's especially bad if you allow years to pass like that. That's what I did, and it's what many others do too.

Ready to break the cycle? Once again, the powerful answer is to give up alcohol.

Alcohol And Work - The Recipe For Disaster

The simple fact is that alcohol and "climbing the ladder" don't mix. That's not to say you won't steadily progress, or that there aren't toxic workplaces where people do manage to get ahead and get drunk in parallel. But as a general rule, alternating between being drunk and being hungover is not the route to smashing your career goals.

Being the office "legend" is not the same as being the office superstar. Many a career path is destroyed by drunken behaviour on work nights out. Weekends of anxiety spent worrying about getting fired are bad enough, but the long-term damage is even worse. Repeated stupidity on nights out earns you nothing other than a reputation, and will almost certainly slow down your progression.

My first work night out in the finance world was heralded as a "low key" office quiz. Unfortunately, I attended it with the anxiety of being the new guy and an inability to stop drinking.

By the end of the night, I'd found myself immersed in a rubbish bin outside the pub. No taxi would take me home

because I was too wrecked. Luckily an old school friend worked behind the bar and somehow got me home to my very embarrassed parents (Thank you Karl!).

This was just the first day of my 12-year career in the corporate world!

Lots of people go to work, do nothing more than “go through the motions”, and still feel like they’re being robbed of the progression they “deserve”. I did that for years. I also had no problem finding other colleagues to moan to about it.

Many workplaces have a culture where people do this night after night. They keep pubs and bars in business while they drink and complain about the firm. Usually, the people who are actually getting the promotions aren’t in the bar with them - certainly not as regularly.

Perhaps you have much in common with your “happy hour crew” of co-workers. But, being realistic, it’s more likely your main shared interests are partying and complaining about the boss, or about the company “culture”.

While you bounce from bar to club to office and back again, you see other people shooting past you in their careers. They’re winning promotions and being given additional responsibility or meeting their sales targets with relative ease. You feel frustrated because they make it look so easy.

If this resonates, and you’re a regular drinker, picture a life where you never have a single hangover. Imagine how much that changes things.

Rocket Launch Your Career

It starts with the simple stuff. When you arrive promptly in the mornings looking fresh, instead of screeching in at 9.05 am looking and smelling stale, people do notice.

It feels good too. The days that begin that way are usually the better days, as you’ll already know from those occasional mornings when you do have your sh*t together. When you don’t drink at all, and never run the risk of a hangover, you

have far more good working days than bad. It's as simple as that.

Then it all begins to compound - in a good way.

Remember that mental clarity and super-fast cognition you get as a result of giving up alcohol? It builds over time and transforms how you perform at work. Your memory, your power of reasoning, and your ability to process information all improve notably (Renewal Lodge, 2019).

You quickly go from “office sloth” to “office ninja!”.

As your weeks of sobriety build to months and years, everything starts to snowball. The people that matter notice the change in you. You can still be the black sheep at the office parties, but standing out because you're sober is far more appealing than standing out because you vomited all over your boss.

As your performance and reliability begins to speak for itself, you also gain the confidence to speak out for yourself. Having genuine faith in your abilities can translate to putting yourself forward for promotions or extra responsibilities, or looking out for something new and different, bigger and better.

That could include deciding to start a business and working for yourself. So far in this chapter, we've worked on the assumption that you have an employee position - working for somebody else. That's not the case for everyone.

Here in the UK, around 15% of workers are self-employed - and that figure is increasing (Gov.uk, 2021).

It's worth noting, at this point, that plenty of people run their own businesses, drink too much, and participate in that same work hard, play hard rat-race. If you're reading this as somebody who already runs a business, I can assure you that choosing to quit drinking can still vastly improve your performance and your prospects.

It's perfectly possible to be self-employed, and still, be “going through the motions” and living for the weekend. You may feel like you're “holding it down” if you're keeping a business afloat, but a drunk or hungover business owner makes all the

same mistakes as a drunk or hungover employee. In some cases, the consequences can be worse, because there's nobody to manage you and ensure you get things done.

Sure, you may not have managers who notice you're hungover, but you have clients instead. They too, notice things like poor punctuality, lack of focus, and beer breath.

As we've established, drinking regularly destroys your confidence and cognitive function. This can mean you don't have the courage to market yourself boldly, or the clarity to pitch for a complicated, high-earning bit of business. Drinking kills your motivation, leaving you content to do what you have to do, rather than what you're truly capable of.

Quitting drinking gives you the time, energy and confidence to build a new business of your own, or to redouble your efforts with your existing ventures.

There are two routes out of being one of the miserable majority of people who dread Monday morning. They're both open to you (and are achievable) in sobriety. Either you can begin to excel as an employee, climbing the ranks and reaping the benefits, or you can decide to branch out on your own.

Once you remove the alcohol, there is a chance you'll discover - as I did - that you hate your corporate job. Thankfully, sobriety gives you the power to consciously choose a better role, or to finally start your dream business.

A recent survey showed that 62% of people want to start businesses of their own (Vista, 2018). Far fewer people actually do it, often due to a lack of time, confidence or money.

It's good news that time, confidence, and money are all things that you gain when you stop drinking!

Starting a business is never easy, but the surefire way to make it impossibly difficult is to be hungover and broke, with a brain that never works at full capacity. When you're firing on all cylinders, with radical clarity and a high level of resilience, anything is possible.

Deciding to give up alcohol provides nothing but good news for your business and career prospects. In sober communities, you constantly see people starting businesses they've long dreamed of, winning big promotions, and surprising themselves by achieving goals they once convinced themselves were unattainable.

Don't waste your working life doing a job you hate. Dare to dream. Waking up fresh and hangover-free is always a great feeling. Waking up on Monday morning feeling inspired and enthusiastic about making your living is better still.

Living only for the weekend is a tragic waste. The larger majority of your life is the rest of the time. You owe it to yourself to enjoy that too.

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CHAPTER 8

The Drunk Planet

We've talked about your health, your relationships, your soul, your career, and a wealth of other things that improve and transform when you stop drinking.

However, the fact still remains that we live on a drunk planet. And that doesn't magically change just because you do.

More and more people are opting for a sober lifestyle, but we still have a society that seems to "run on alcohol". The conditioning runs deep, so it's inevitable that you will continue to find yourself in environments where everything revolves around booze.

How many times have you heard the saying "don't trust people who don't drink alcohol" or "I use to think drinking was bad for me, so I gave up thinking". This planet is completely sh*t faced when it comes to understanding how dangerous alcohol can actually be.

Ultimately, you have to adapt to being alcohol-free in those environments or find different environments that are more compatible with the transformed version of you. The good news is that those environments do exist - but you may need to do some groundwork to find them.

In this final chapter, we look at the societal conditioning that created this drunk planet. As well as teaching you how to thrive in sobriety, it will also likely provide some reassurance. If you've found yourself stuck in an unhealthy feedback loop until now, it's really not your fault. The odds were stacked against you from the start.

There's a saying that "if you hang around the barbershop for long enough, sooner or later, you are going to get a haircut."

Similarly, if you hang around pubs and bars long enough, sooner or later, you'll get drunk. And if you're curious and

prone to temptation, drugs will probably find you too. They're everywhere (and I mean everywhere).

A more accurate description is if you hang around pubs and bars long enough, you'll get drunk/high, regret it for the next day, week, month or year, be broke, feel ill, order takeaway food, miss the gym for the next week, make mistakes at work, and feel depressed, anxious and soulless.

The really crazy thing is that millions of people do that all the time, and then frame it as a "good night out". It's what you do, it's what everyone does. It's considered "normal".

In a world where pubs and bars are the default places for adult "fun" and "relaxation", it's no wonder people end up in an unhealthy cycle. That cycle got hold of me for 17 years.

That societal conditioning has a lot to answer for.

You almost feel obliged to call it a "good night out". It's what's expected of you. The internet is littered with memes and in-jokes about hangovers and drunken behaviour.

But if you actually break down what that "good night out" involved, and how you felt afterwards, was it really good? Probably not.

Let's look at a few scenarios around booze culture, and how it is such a fundamental part of daily life. After that, we will look at how to do things in a more evolved, healthy and rewarding way.

Let's Get Sh*t Faced

I spent three years at university and got "sh*t faced" almost every day. I'd often throw up after a night out and hardly remember any of it - but this was considered "normal". It was part of the university "experience" and, yes, along with many others, I convinced myself - at the time - that it was "fun".

Blackouts, excessive vomiting and idiotic behaviour shouldn't be viewed as normal - at any age. But, as we've clearly established, we live on a drunk planet. In the UK, and many other countries, getting drunk and "enjoying yourself", is what you're supposed to do when you're "young, wild and free".

Nowadays, when people ask me if I had fun at university, I am hesitant to say “yes”. Blackouts, vomiting, debt and a 2:1 in Business Management is hardly worth writing about compared to my sober achievements.

I don't want to sound like a sober bore here, so I will acknowledge that student life taught me valuable life skills around socialising with people. But it all revolved around alcohol (and drugs). Even the sports days on Wednesdays were followed up that night with drunken “Athletic Union” nights!

That pattern of getting drunk after playing sport has always been around. A pattern you can see at rugby clubs, hockey clubs, rowing clubs, running clubs, football clubs, golf clubs, cricket clubs, tennis clubs, bowls clubs, and the list goes on.

We haven't even touched on the crazy drinking ‘initiations’ that go on at some of these ‘sports’ clubs. Apparently excessively drinking out of a dirty old boot while running around a field butt naked is a form of acceptance.

In my second year at university, I was voted in as a “Week One Rep”. My role was to look after freshers for the first week of their university life. The job was all about getting those new arrivals as drunk as possible for seven nights in a row. All of which was endorsed by the University.

If proof were needed that booze culture is truly ingrained in universities, the “Week One Rep” role is supposedly one of the most sought-after in student life. These rituals and rites of passage present booze as some all-encompassing “elixir of life”, and generation after generation of students hit early adulthood being taught that's normal.

University is just one environment where alcohol culture is endemic. There are plenty more, including boozed-up holidays.

If you grew up in the UK, then you might have heard of 18-30's style holidays. Even better still, you might have gone on one and still be regretting that one-night stand or those sex games that you were made to take part in!

British people love going abroad, getting sh*t faced every night, having food at the local Irish pub and then going back home to do it all again in a much colder climate. This was how I spent my holidays from the age of 17-25.

The culture around holidays and excessive boozing was so bad, we actually had successful travel companies making money out of it! People would endure a week of mindless drinking, vomiting, catching multiple STIs, crashing rented scooters, eating McDonald's and come home saying that was "fun".

Even when I went to Vegas, Ibiza and Cancun for what I thought was "maturing" holidays, the booze kept flowing and the drugs became a bigger part of the experience. As I got older, the hangovers were getting worse and the holidays felt more and more of a struggle.

Tired of the British cultural holidays, we decided to go to Cancun for the American style "Spring Break". We thought it might be an easier few weeks away but it turns out, Americans drink just as much as we do!

The worst part of the trip is that we went for two full weeks. I was almost 30 by this time and my liver was on the verge of nuclear fallout after just two days.

The conclusion was, it doesn't matter where you go, the booze-fuelled holiday culture is a global thing! Yes, I had fun on these holidays, but what I realise now, is that I couldn't drink like everyone else. The vomiting, blackouts, doing stupid sh*t, all followed me wherever I went and it was anything but relaxing.

Now let's have a look at another example of alcohol-fuelled culture. The workplace.

The world of manual labour has a heavy drink and drug culture. Once again it formed due to generations of people doing the same things. It's considered "normal" to finish a job at 3 pm, then head to the pub to spend most of the day's wages on alcohol (and possibly drugs too).

Turning up the next day hungover is expected and widely accepted. The circle of work - drink - hangover - repeat is nothing more than day-to-day “normal” life for many people.

It’s the same in much of the corporate world. In fact, for many, entering that environment simply provides a way to continue and build on the habits learned in university.

Corporate teams drink to celebrate wins (and commiserate losses). They drink for birthdays, to welcome new starters, or to say farewell to people leaving. There are conferences, team drinks, boozy client lunches, “away days” and team-building events.

Not all offices are the same, but much of the above usually applies. Some industries are particularly “hardcore”. The world of advertising has long had a reputation for being extremely boozy. Some firms reportedly provide access to rehab facilities due to the “nature of the job”.

Corporate drinking culture was a disaster for me. When you have the kind of relationship with alcohol that I had, constant access to it made it very difficult to get ahead. Alcohol brings out the worst in me, and I often felt that I was “walking on eggshells” around everybody with the power to fire me.

It’s nonsensical that the use of alcohol is so widely encouraged, yet overindulgence remains taboo and frowned upon. But on the drunk planet, everybody is expected to walk an incredibly delicate line - drink to fit in, but always the exact amount not to overstep the mark and do something foolish. That’s not really feasible with an addictive drug that compromises your judgement! If you want to see how widespread this problem is, check out these statistics around work Christmas parties: A survey found that 89% of people in the UK acknowledged getting drunk at these events, with 65% saying their “behaviour was affected in a negative way”. 45% admitted to “making a fool of themselves”, and a rather staggering 9% had been fired or disciplined (Roberts, 2018).

Quite aside from the nearly one in ten people losing their jobs as a result of the main annual work night out, those figures demonstrate that an awful lot of workers regret the things they

do after a few drinks. It seems likely that across the world, millions of people destroy their Christmas holidays by feeling anxious and embarrassed, or wondering if they'll be getting fired in the new year!

But, once again, drinking is what happens in the work environment because it's what's always happened.

So that covers the workplace. White-collar or blue, the chances are there's some deeply embedded booze culture to navigate.

Unfortunately, it gets worse. Exposure to alcohol culture often happens long before people get to university, or into the workplace.

My parents went to pubs and clubs, and so did their parents. At school, my friends' parents, like mine, went to pubs and clubs, and so did their parents. It's no surprise - they all live on this planet too!

The result is that we grow up noticing, taking all of it in, and seeing it all as normal. It is normal for many - it's what people do.

Is it a wise or healthy thing to do? No.

Does it make all of those people happy? No.

Does alcohol "suit" everyone? Absolutely not.

But it's often the environment people grow up in, meaning that they reach adulthood not knowing anything different.

Did my parents set out to raise an addict? Of course not. But there were some environmental factors in play that were beyond their control.

I come from an Italian family. Wine is part of Italian culture and has been for generations. My Nonna is 94 years old, and she still can't believe that I can't just have one drink. Not drinking is an alien concept to her, as drinking and "having fun" was a big thing for her generation too.

She actually said to me, at 94 years old, "how do you have fun if you don't drink?!".

I'm not claiming that my Nonna is the problem here! She was brought up within that booze culture, like millions of others. There's also an argument that if she's 94 and still going strong, what's the problem with alcohol?

Well, the answer to that is simple: alcohol doesn't affect everybody in the same way. Some people never have more than one drink at a time! For others, like me, it's like lighting the touchpaper or betting everything on black.

It's not about anybody else, it's about your relationship with alcohol. It's unlikely you'd be reading this if you thought you could "take it or leave it". When alcohol is an emotional crutch, it becomes extremely negative. It's a world away from a glass of wine and the good life it portrays.

It's not just Italians who have alcohol deeply engrained into their national identity. France is known for its wine and champagne, Scotland for its whiskey and Ireland for its Guinness. They're almost the first things you think about when someone mentions their name.

As you can see, my own environment was always very "booze-centric". From childhood, through university, and into the corporate world, alcohol was everywhere.

Alcohol "culture" finds its way into many environments beyond family, education and work. Let's consider the world of sport.

Aside from the athletes who are actually taking part, many of the people on the fringes - the fans and the spectators - tend to drink as part of the experience. Going to the football tends to start with beers and end with more beers. Drunken behaviour often hits the news after large tournaments.

Once again, this is cultural conditioning. If you love your team, what would be wrong with just going to enjoy a game without drinking? Would it be too cynical to suggest that, for many football fans, it's not so much about the love of the game but more about the excuse for boozing every weekend?

The trouble is that most people prefer to follow the crowd than marking themselves out as the "black sheep". Even if, deep

down, we don't much like drinking and hate the consequences, it can seem easier just to go along with it.

Over time, we come to see the drunk planet as the normal planet. The issue there is that hangxiety, headaches, empty wallets, depression, vomiting, guilt, shame, and all the other negatives of regular drinking become normal too.

It's not normal. It's completely MENTAL.

You Are Your Environment

However, you also need to be aware of those environmental factors, and how generations of cultural conditioning exist. Without being wise to that, you're vulnerable to being pulled back in. After all, it's all "normal", right?

Take a look at this quote from W Clement Stone, a self-help author, mental health philanthropist, and pioneer of "positive mental attitude":

"You are a product of your environment. So choose the environment that will best develop you toward your objective. Analyse your life in terms of its environment. Are the things around you helping you toward success - or are they holding you back?"

This doesn't mean that you need to quit drinking and then abandon your family, friends, career and favourite sports team! However, it makes a lot of sense to do some serious soul searching.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Is the drinking culture in your workplace holding you back from getting a promotion, pay rise or bonus?
- Are you tolerating your current job because it allows you to "get away" with a work - drink - moan - hangover - work again cycle?
- Are your football mates, your bottomless brunch gang or your clubbing pals causing you to remain in a pattern of overindulgence and regret?

- Do certain friends or family members trigger or encourage you to drink, or fail to support your efforts to do other things?

The answers to questions like that provide you with valuable clues around what you could change about the environments you exist in.

Alcohol is everywhere, but you don't have to say "yes" to it. Back in the third chapter, we talked about the power of saying "no" to friends if you don't fancy certain nights out. The people that matter don't mind, and the people that mind don't matter.

If you wish, you can stay in all of the same environments and do so sober. Giving up drinking doesn't mean changing every aspect of your life, and it's unlikely you'll need to.

However, some particularly boozy environments will inevitably cease to seem so inviting - either because they no longer appeal to you, or because a particular crowd is less accepting of the sober version of you.

That's actually a good thing. It gives you the chance to move into circles of people who fully accept you, and your sobriety. And the thing is, there are many of them. When you're absorbed by booze culture, or hiding hungover from the world, it's easy not to notice them. Furthermore, they don't tend to advertise their existence to heavy drinkers!

I worked in the corporate world for 12 years, but I've never been happier than when I left to become a strength & conditioning coach. Suddenly I was in a world where not drinking is lauded for health reasons, rather than considered "boring" or abnormal.

That simple change of environment turned "normal" on its head.

I swapped pubs and clubs for gyms and bookshops. As a result, my life took a massive leap forward in terms of personal growth. I spend time at golf clubs, at parks, and in coffee shops - with other sober people, and with people who still drink, but respect my life without booze.

There are plenty of sober spaces on this drunk planet. There are sober environments filled with people who share your interests and passions. There are sober spaces populated with people who are more than capable of having fun. There are also plenty of places where non-drinkers mix contentedly with occasional drinkers.

There's a lot of world to explore.

While it does often feel as if much of adult life is centred around booze, there are lots of people who aren't stuck in a constant cycle of drinking. In 2019, the US National Survey on Drug Use and Health asked adults whether they had drunk alcohol in the previous month. 54.9% of them had, but that leaves 45.1% who hadn't. 30.5% hadn't drunk in the whole of the past year (NIH, 2022).

That means there's an awful lot of people out there who don't drink at all or only drink occasionally.

Getting your environment right is an important key to being sober on a drunk planet. As this chapter has demonstrated, it's no wonder people follow the herd towards the more obvious places and the culturally embedded ways to have "fun". They've often followed their families, their friends, and their workmates - doing "normal" stuff - sometimes at huge personal cost.

"Normal" doesn't mean "right". And the data actually shows that millions of people enjoy a vastly different "normal".

You can be one of them, and they'll welcome you with open arms.

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CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

Right at the start of this book, I mentioned how important it is to reframe the idea of “giving up” alcohol. That language implies that you’re “giving up” something desirable - that by being sober on a drunk planet, you somehow lose something worth having.

Thanks to alcohol’s deeply embedded role in adult life, it’s no wonder people fall for that. It’s why so many carry on doing something they know to be damaging because they feel like they will “miss out” if they stop.

But life doesn’t end when you get sober. Life changes. Life is different. Life is better.

Perhaps if this drunk planet was more of an honest place, it would all be framed rather differently. How about:

- “I’m giving up being overweight”.
- “I’m giving up being anxious and depressed”.
- “I’m giving up making stupid decisions”.
- “I’m giving up my soulless career”.
- “I’m giving up headaches and nausea”.
- “I’m giving up my toxic relationships”.
- “I’m giving up being broke a week after every payday”.
- “I’m giving up following what society says is ‘fun’ and taking ownership of my own happiness”.

They’re all far more attractive propositions, and far more reflective of what being sober on a drunk planet really involves.

As I said earlier, Sober Sean and Drunk Sean are completely different people. But I didn’t get to meet Sober Sean until I quit drinking and began my recovery from alcohol and drugs.

The contrast between who I am now and who I was then is a drastic one. The person who now leaps out of bed ready to meet a personal training client barely recognises the empty, quivering shell who was permanently unwell, overweight, and in debt from buying alcohol and cocaine.

I certainly hit a “rock bottom”, but it’s not obligatory to do that before you begin your own recovery. In fact, surely it’s better if you don’t?

If you accept that you’re on the wrong path, why wait to travel further down it before taking action? As Einstein said, “insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”.

With that in mind, why not try sober life now? I’ve never met anybody who regrets getting sober, but if you end up being the exception, your old life will still be there waiting for you if that’s what you want.

Transforming from “drunk you” to “sober you” isn’t an instant thing. Life is different, and there will be a period of adjustment. “Fun” gets redefined. Your new life will likely be filled with different (like-minded) people, different hobbies and activities, and different priorities.

That’s perhaps a scary thing, but it’s also an incredibly exciting thing. Sober life is more wholesome and filled with nature, gratitude and new experiences.

As Thomas Jefferson once said, “If you want something you’ve never had, you must be willing to do something you’ve never done”.

If going sober allows you to have all the things you always wanted, then surely it’s worth a try?

Since we’re talking about giving things up, why don’t we reframe it and look at what you give up by NOT giving sober living a try:

- You give up the chance to finally like what you see in the mirror.
- You give up the opportunity to lose weight and build muscle.

- You give up the “sober glow” and the clear skin.
- You give up on a scientifically proven way to improve your mental and physical health.
- You give up a way to drastically reduce your chances of suffering from a host of illnesses - from those that destroy your quality of life, to those that could cut it short.
- You give up on making better decisions.
- You give up on a way to have an enormous amount of extra money to spend.
- You give up on having better relationships with your partner, your friends, your children, and your extended family.
- You give up the chance to date people you have a genuine, sober affinity with.
- You give up on experiencing fulfilling, loving, sober sex.
- You give up on the chance to meet your true “tribe” - the people you have more in common with than a love for the “party” lifestyle.
- You give up on personal growth.
- You give up the opportunity to connect with your spiritual side, and to feed your soul.
- You give up the chance to find out what “fun” can really mean. You swap the genuine, child-like excitement of doing things you love for the repetitive “adult” drudgery of expecting to find fun in a can or a bottle.
- You give up on building a business or career that inspires you daily and stay on the hamster wheel with the majority of other people.

That’s a lot of things to give up when the alternative is giving up just one thing - alcohol.

As we reach the end of this book, hopefully, you can see for yourself that sobriety really can “deliver everything alcohol promised”. And that giving up alcohol really can be the unexpected shortcut to becoming healthy, happy and financially free.

Do you want to give up alcohol?– Join our FREE support group

Sober On A Drunk Planet – Giving Up Alcohol Community on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soberonadrunkplanet>

Follow the Sober On A Drunk Planet Instagram account:

<https://www.instagram.com/soberonadrunkplanet/>

You may find the following resources helpful:

DrinkAware’s alcohol unit and calorie counter:

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools/unit-and-calorie-calculator>

DrinkAware’s Self-Assessment tool to assess your drinking:

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools/self-assessment>

The UK NHS guide to alcohol misuse:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/>

The US CDC’s guide to alcohol and public health:

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm>

A list of alcohol addiction support groups in the USA:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/alcohol-addiction-support-groups>

Addiction support from the UK NHS:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/drug-addiction-getting-help/>

Alcohol specific support in the UK: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/>

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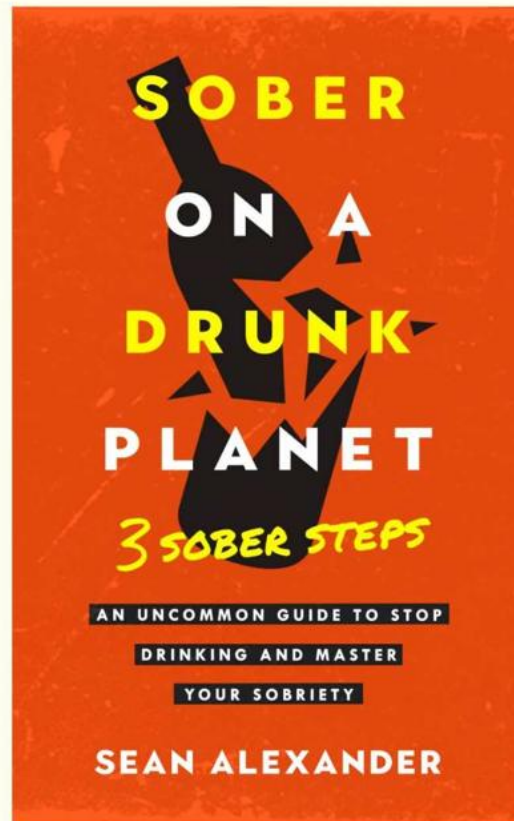
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