

The Autopilot

Changing the Habits That Are Keeping You Stuck

For the moments you look down and there's already a glass in your hand, with no memory of deciding to pour it.

AS A DRINKER ON AUTOPILOT, you're often consuming alcohol without being fully aware of your actions or your choices. You look down and suddenly there's a glass in your hand with no recollection of deciding to pour it. Sound familiar? This isn't a willpower problem. This is a habit problem. The good news is that habits can be changed once you understand how they work.

THE HABIT LOOP: How Your Brain Makes Automatic Decisions

Habits are your brain's way of making life easier for you. They are a shortcut to saving energy and managing the 35,000+ decisions you have to make every day.

Every habit follows the same three-part cycle: TRIGGER → ACTION → REWARD
Let's explore...

Understanding Your Subconscious Drinking Patterns

THE TRIGGER

Something happens that sets the cycle in motion:

Stress from work · Kids' bedtime routine (or lack thereof) · Certain people or places · Boredom or loneliness · Specific times (e.g. 5pm)

THE ACTION

What you do in response to the trigger:

Pour yourself a glass of wine / a beer / a G&T... This is the part that happens on autopilot. It could be anything you'd like to stop doing habitually.

THE REWARD

The feeling you're seeking:

Relaxation · Taking the edge off · Feeling connected · Marking the transition from work to home · Numbing from unwanted feelings

Now we Spot the Loop · Break the Loop · Track the Loop...

Spot the Loop

Before you can do anything differently, you need to see what's actually happening.

WHAT'S THE TRIGGER, RIGHT NOW?



Stress from work? The kids' bedtime routine? A certain person or place? Boredom, loneliness, or just the clock hitting a certain time? Name it to own it.

WHAT DOES THE ACTION LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?



Is it pouring the glass before you've even registered deciding to? Where in the evening does it happen — and how automatic does it feel?

WHAT REWARD ARE YOU ACTUALLY AFTER?



Relaxation? Taking the edge off? Connection? Marking the end of the working day? Numbing something you don't want to feel? Name what you think the drink is actually doing for you.

WHAT ELSE COULD GIVE THAT TO YOU?



Quiet? Movement? Food? Ten minutes doing nothing? Alcohol is just one way to achieve what you want – there are others that you can and should explore, too.

Break the Loop

You don't have to solve everything tonight but you can start to untangle the habit loop

Acknowledge: Accept that the trigger has fired and the pull toward the glass is real. Pretending you don't notice it won't make it go away. This is a normal part of changing the way you drink.

Decide: Make an actual choice about whether alcohol gets a say in this moment or not. Be honest with yourself about if that drink will actually give you what you need now, and in the long run.

IF YOU CHOOSE TO DRINK

Delay: Even though you are choosing to drink, delaying it, even by just 10 minutes, teaches your brain that this is a measured decision and not just an automatic reaction.

It sets a standard that you take forward for future decisions.

Consider: You still have the option to choose a lighter alcohol drink. A mid-range spirit & mixer or a half-strength beer or wine can give you the flavour notes you might want, but with just half the alcohol content.

IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO DRINK

Reduce the trigger where you can.

You can't eliminate stress, boredom or a hard bedtime routine from your life altogether, but you can change how you react to it.

Pause before reacting. Ask yourself: "Is getting wound up actually helping me solve this?"

Find a new action for the same reward. What gives you the relaxation / connection / transition you're seeking, without alcohol?

Movement (your body's natural stress processor) · A favourite low/no drink ritual · Calling a friend who makes you laugh · 10 minutes doing absolutely nothing.

Be prepared. Don't leave it to chance. Stock your fridge with alternatives. Keep your running shoes by the door. Have your plan ready BEFORE the trigger hits.

Track the Loop

Delete the examples and fill this in with your own, as evenings come up:

Put it all together and make a plan you can use next time this trigger fires.

What's triggering you today?	What I was actually after	What I did instead?	Did it help? (out of 10)
Walking home into this morning's mess	A moment to relax after a long day	Put my trainers/sneakers on and went for a walk	9/10
Bad bedtime	Something to calm me down	Tried a calming functional drink	7/10

Relaxation matters



Cheers to a life less intoxicated!

Keep Exploring

Changing how you drink rarely happens in one sitting.

It happens over and over again in the small moments of noticing what you reached for, why you reached for it, and what you actually need instead.

→ The **Podcast** goes deeper into the thinking.

→ The **Vault** holds the practical tools.

And the **4-Week Midlife Mindful Drinking Reset** gives everything structure and helps ‘autopilot’ drinkers to break the habits they’ve spent decades building.

In week 1, you’ll learn to build awareness of your own habits.

In week 2 you’ll set boundaries that protect you and your goals.

In week 3 you’ll find ways to optimise your stress, energy and health.

And in week 4 you’ll put it all together so you can build a life less intoxicated on your own terms.

→ **The 4-Week Midlife Mindful Drinking Reset**

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UK support is available through [Alcohol Change UK](#) and the [NHS](#). If you are outside the UK, contact an appropriate healthcare or alcohol-support service in your country. In an emergency, contact your local emergency services.

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