

Limiting Alcohol Consumption, Embracing Alcohol-Free Adventures for a Fulfilling Summer

By Jasmine Taylor, Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness

When the sun's out, the fun's out! Why not take advantage of summer by exploring new ways to enjoy your downtime? Consider incorporating more alcohol-free options into your sunny adventures to enrich this summer.

Many Soldiers who have chosen to limit their drinking or occasionally engage in alcohol-free activities have noticed positive changes in their personal lives. Eric Fleuter, Army Substance Abuse Program Prevention Branch Chief at Fort Riley, Kansas, said he has witnessed everything from an increase in overall health to building and fostering better relationships.

Fleuter described situations where two or more Soldiers in a friend group choose to drink less alcohol, potentially inspiring their friends to make new choices. "(It) allows friends within that network the option to choose between the status quo (drinking) or trying something different. After participating in something different, they find that they can or do enjoy other activities besides the typical parties."

Dabbling in alcohol-free activities could also spark an interest in or more time for leisurely pursuits. Fleuter said he has witnessed Soldiers who previously did not experiment with different hobbies commit to trying something new after changing their drinking habits. "One Soldier I know started playing guitar and became so proficient at it that he, in turn, started offering lessons and hosting alcohol-free jam sessions for fellow Soldiers just to make music," he said.

"Another Soldier started playing around with photography and generated a calendar of their photos, which they later printed and sold for a profit," Fleuter said. "I have seen so many positive, productive changes that once people give change a chance, the motivation for most to continue making low-risk choices becomes empowering."

Making low-risk choices includes following responsible drinking guidelines, which encourage individuals to learn about alcohol misuse and standard drink sizes, to practice healthy stress management techniques and, sometimes, to choose not to drink.

Beyond the social and emotional health benefits of cutting back on alcohol, Fleuter said, a lesser-known advantage is saving money. He has spoken with Soldiers who, after they've quit drinking, did a budget review of how much they spent on alcohol. "They saved and set that money aside, and after a few short months, it (was) a significant amount. One Soldier was able to take their mother on a vacation," he said.

The Army offers a variety of resources to support Soldiers in their journey toward healthier choices. The Morale, Welfare and Recreation program directly supports readiness by providing the Army community with a comprehensive network of programs and services, including fitness and sports, entertainment, travel and leisure activities. Joel Miller, Chief of the Family and MWR division, suggests that Soldiers and their Families consider adding one of the following activities to their summer schedule if they are interested in alcohol-free adventures.

- Take advantage of equipment rentals, to enjoy the outdoors your way.
- Travel to one of the numerous military RV parks, or check out the local campsites at select installations.
- Hit the greens at a local Army golf course.
- Participate in the fitness activities offered on installations. Check listings for classes, runs and expos near you.
- Check out local arts and crafts programs, which host woodworking, ceramics, sewing and painting classes. Some classes can be coordinated if requested for a group.

Soldiers who may need help with alcohol-related issues can get support without having to join a mandatory treatment program. ASAP, Army commanders, primary care providers, chaplains and any officer or noncommissioned officer in their chain of command can refer them to the right source of assistance. If you or someone you know needs support, try the following [resources](#) recommended by Own Your Limits, a Defense Department educational campaign.

- **Tricare Alcohol Awareness:** Find Tricare-specific alcohol awareness [information and resources](#).
- **Military OneSource Substance Abuse and Addiction:** Find [materials](#) that describe signs of alcohol misuse and where to get help.
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** Offers fact sheets, answers to frequently asked questions and other [information](#) about alcohol and public health.
- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:** For more information on the impact that alcohol may have on your health, visit this [site](#).
- **VetChange:** This app for service members and veterans features interactive tools on managing stress, explains the connection between alcohol and post-traumatic stress and helps individuals learn how to drink in a healthier way. Download the [app](#) (available only for iOS devices).

Whether it's joining a local event, picking up a new pastime or teaming up with a buddy to cut back on drinks, these choices can lead to more fulfilling experiences this summer. Embrace the season and make lasting memories, all while keeping your health and choices in mind.