

Q & A Mindline



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Q My friend is often intoxicated with alcohol and then gets into a fight or argument which ruins our parties. When we tell him that he drinks too much, he states that it is because of 'mixing his drinks.' I have asked this question on his behalf and want him to read your reply. Please help.

There is no such thing as getting intoxicated by 'mixing alcoholic drinks!' Such proclamations are made by people who end up losing control over their consumption and have too many drinks. Like your friend, it is common for people to attribute their behaviour to external factors, rather than accepting responsibility for it.

Owning up for what you do or did, is a prerequisite to learning, growth and transformation. How else does one bring about change? He is lucky to have assistance from a friend like you who stands by him, despite his drunk and disorderly behaviour.

If possible, he should stop drinking altogether, as rejuvenation is more likely with sobriety. If not, ask him to count his drinks, whatever he may be drinking, at any future event. Equally,

keep an eye on him, as those who drink too much, tend to underplay their consumption. It would be ideal if he cuts down his intake during the week and have 'drink free days' whenever possible. Help him to restrict the consumption to a couple of drinks for future parties and make sure he is well hydrated with non-alcoholic drinks or water intermittently. I think he should eat something before a drink session and have healthy snacks and/or meals during or after a party.

Finally, for those who get intoxicated and get in trouble after drinking, it may be time for a change - 'drink the drink, don't let it drink you.' Also, it is well established that regular excessive drinking leads to alcoholic dependency syndrome or alcohol addiction, which might be harder to change without professional psychological assistance and/or medicinal intervention.

Q Is it true that, 'once a smoker always a smoker?' I have tried to kick the habit, but so far have been unsuccessful. In fact, I have somewhat given up quitting. But with the onset of New Year, I want to change and start afresh. I smoke 20 cigarettes a day and it seems to get worse when I drink! What is your absolute advice on quitting successfully?

There cannot be an absolute advice, as habits vary and so does individual circumstances and personalities. But remember, starting with pessimism will lead to suboptimal effort and reduce your chances of success in giving up this dreadful habit. You have failed, when you have failed to try, but making an effort to quit is already progress in the 'cycle of change.'

Quitting smoking may be the best thing you will do in your lifetime. So, don't quit on quitting! Giving up something

you feel afflicted with and taking up a new hobby or healthier habits is the best way to start a new year.

Keep in mind, tobacco contains nicotine, which is one of the most addictive substances known to man, perhaps more so, than heroin. Additionally, it also contains carbon monoxide, tar and 60 odd chemicals, which seriously damages health. While it's difficult to quit, it can never be impossible!

Change can be hard and motivation is dynamic and subject to enormous fluctuation. So, try one day at a time, building on successes of the previous day and/or learning from lack of it. Write a smoking diary to identify patterns of smoking, especially times of 'critical' cigarettes (smoking after meals etc.) Choose a day to quit and go for a ceremonial burial of cigarettes and its paraphernalia. Also, making a formal announcement of your intentions to friends and family will help you to stick with it.

Designate an anchor (ideally your spouse or partner) to encourage, support and push you to achieve your goals. Delay and distract your urges to smoke with juices, healthy snacks and mint. Avoid the company of smokers and drinking environments till you get on track. Take up exercise to reap the benefits of clearer breathing. Importantly, consider nicotine substitutes like a patch, chewing gums or inhaler. Additionally, there is also medication to reduce cravings and associated anxiety.

Research suggests that the majority who try to quit without specialist advice and substitutes, go back to smoking, soon afterwards. Hence, you should receive formal motivational therapy and other needed professional input to increase your chances of success.