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Expert offers ways to tell if you're drinking too much

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Maybe your 2015 ended with a bang of booze. If you're nursing a holiday hangover, perhaps it's time for a change.

Whether your family has an addiction history that's prompting a re-thinking, or you are simply questioning whether a cocktail should accompany every night's dinner as an appetizer, it never hurts to re-evaluate health choices. Recently, readers responded to a column by Andy Boyle about what happened after he gave up booze.

We talked to Dr. Indra Cidambi, psychiatrist and medical director for the Center for Network Therapy in New Jersey, which helps guide patients through detox.



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One clue it might be time for a change? If you find yourself explaining that your alcohol intake is a reasonable amount, whether to yourself or others.

"When we don't want to do something, as human beings, we justify," she said. This is an edited transcript.

Q: So, New Year's resolution season. Is January a good time to cut back?

A: It's not a good idea to do something because of the season, because that's not why you should do it. You want to really look at the whole bigger picture. Do I really want to do it? And if so, you need to jot down at least three reasons.

Q: How do you decide if it's time to drink less?

A: If I feel that my drinking has been impacting my day-to-day life; other people are pointing out to me, "You're drinking too much." That means the functioning of that individual is being jeopardized. The question is, should I

be drinking, should I be cutting down or should I quit drinking?

Drinking alcohol in moderation or not drinking at all would be the question.

Q: What is drinking in moderation?

A: The guideline is one drink a day for women of all ages and men older than 65 years of age. If it is a man (65 or younger), up to two drinks a day.

Having said that, that kind of moderate alcohol use is really unheard of.

Q: What is considered more than drinking in moderation?

A: More than three drinks a day or more than 7 drinks a week for women and men over 65. Four drinks a day or more than 14 drinks a week for (younger) men.

Q: What are the pros and cons of going cold turkey?

A: (For addicts), cold turkey is very dangerous.

You really want to cut down mindfully, depending on about how much and how long the person has been drinking. Go to the primary care doctor. Be honest about how many drinks a day you've been drinking.

For regular drinkers, if somebody is drinking three to four drinks a day, they cut the drinking to two drinks a day, one drink a day. Bring it down. Say, "Today, maybe I will not drink. Let me try to kind of quit my evening drink as soon as I walk into the house." Instead of going three times a week to parties, cutting down and going once.

Q: Is it helpful to cut out one thing, like beer or liquor?

A: One drink is one drink. People will say, "I no longer want to drink hard liquor; I'll only do red wine or white wine." It's really the justification again.

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