

## Cutting back on drinking

### Background

In 2013/14, one in five (20%) New Zealanders aged 15 years or more who drank alcohol in the past year reported a potentially hazardous alcohol consumption pattern (Ministry of Health, 2014). This fact sheet looks at the extent to which New Zealand adults are considering changing their alcohol consumption, and actively seeking information and support to help them do so.

### Methodology

The 2013 Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS 2013) included questions about changes in drinking patterns and whether those people who drank alcohol had considered cutting back during the past year.

Responses to these questions by adult respondents (age 18 years and over, who reported drinking alcohol during the previous month, n=2,179) were compared by gender, ethnicity, age and risky drinking behaviour. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between groups are reported.

### Changing drinking pattern

All respondents who had drunk alcohol during the previous month were asked: "Compared to this time last year, would you say you are now drinking more alcohol, less alcohol or about the same amount of alcohol?".

Compared with a year earlier, 13% (11-14%) of those who had drunk alcohol said they were drinking more, 27% (25-29%) said they were drinking less and 60% (59-63%) said they were drinking about the same amount.

Those more likely to say they were drinking more included:

- Younger adults aged 18 to 24 years (33%) compared with people in all older age groups.

- People of Pacific ethnicities (22%) compared with those of New Zealand European/Other ethnicities (11%).
- People who reported some risky drinking (19%) or regular risky drinking (23%) compared with those who had not drunk to a risky level during the previous four weeks (8%).

### Thinking about cutting back on drinking

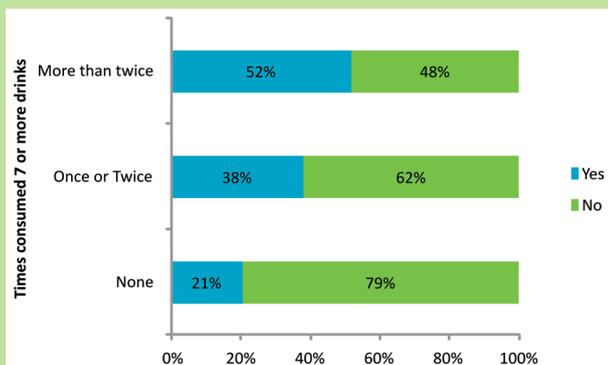
All respondents who had drunk alcohol during the previous month were asked: "In the last 12 months have you thought about cutting back on how much you drink?".

One-third (32%, 30-34%) of people who had drunk alcohol reported that they had thought about cutting back. This represented 18% (17-19%) of the overall population, including those who had not been drinking alcohol in the month prior to the survey.

Those most likely to say they had thought of cutting back included:

- People who reported some risky drinking (38%) or regular risky drinking (53%) during the previous four weeks, compared with those who had not drunk this much on any occasion (28%) (Figure 1).
- People aged 25 to 44 years (36%) and 45 to 64 years (32%), compared with those aged 65 years and over (21%).

Some differences by ethnicity and younger age group (18 to 24 years) became insignificant once drinking behaviour was controlled for.



**Figure 1: Response to “In the last 12 months have you thought about cutting back on how much you drink?”, by risky drinking occasions during previous month**

## Looking for information about cutting back on drinking

All respondents who had drunk alcohol during the previous month were asked: “And in the last 12 months, have you looked or asked for advice, information or help on how to cut back on your drinking? Has anyone given you any advice, information or help on how to cut back on your drinking?”.

Of those who had drunk alcohol, 3% (2-4%) said that they had looked for advice, information or help on how to cut back on drinking. This represented 2% of the overall survey sample.

Of those who had drunk alcohol, 7% (6-9%) reported that someone had given them advice, information or help on how to cut back on drinking. This represented 4% of the overall survey sample.

Nearly three in four (73%) of those who had been given advice or information did not report that they had looked for it themselves.

Those more likely to say they had looked for information on cutting back included:

- People who reported regular risky drinking (8%) compared with those who had not drunk to a risky level during the previous four weeks (2%).
- People of Māori (7%) and Asian (7%) ethnicities compared with those of European/Other ethnicities (2%).

Some differences by age became insignificant once drinking behaviour was controlled for.

Those more likely to say they had been given information about how to cut back included:

- People aged 18 to 24 years (11%) and 25 to 44 years (8%) compared with those aged 65 years and over (3%).
- People who reported some risky drinking (11%) or regular risky drinking (18%) compared with those who had not drunk to a risky level during the previous four weeks (4%).
- Māori (16%) compared with those of European/Other ethnicities (6%).

Differences by gender became insignificant once drinking behaviour was controlled for.

## Key points

- Younger people are more likely to report a recent increase in the amount of alcohol they drink.
- While nearly one-third of recent drinkers had thought about cutting back on their drinking, a much smaller proportion had actively sought information or advice on how to do this.
- People who reported recent risky drinking were more likely to consider cutting back and to look for information about cutting back, compared with those who drank more lightly.
- Many of the demographic differences in information-seeking and consideration of cutting back on drinking were explained by drinking behaviour, which was the more relevant factor.
- Regardless of their personal pattern of alcohol consumption, younger adults and Māori were more likely to have been given advice or information about cutting back on drinking.

## About the Attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol survey

- The ABAS is a nationwide telephone survey conducted annually. The survey focuses on behaviour related to the previous month and last drinking occasion, and a range of attitudes/opinions towards alcohol. The 2013 ABAS consisted of a sample of 4,001 New Zealanders aged 15 years and over. The survey was conducted between November 2013 and February 2014.
- The main sample, with a response rate of 22%, included 662 Māori, 245 Pacific peoples, 314 Asian people and 2,780 people of European or other ethnicities (prioritised ethnicity).
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) to ensure they are representative of the New Zealand population.
- For this analysis, proportions and 95% confidence intervals were produced. Odds ratios were undertaken to compare responses between groups. The significance level used for statistical analyses was set to  $\alpha=0.05$ .
- Comparison groups for these analyses were as follows:
  - Gender (male compared with female)
  - Ethnicity (European/Other compared with Māori, Pacific, Asian)
  - Age (18 to 24 years compared with 25 to 44, 45 to 64, and 65 or more)
  - Drinking patterns over the last four weeks: consuming seven or more alcoholic drinks on one or two occasions (“some risky drinking”) and more than two occasions (“regular risky drinking”) compared with not drinking this much on any one occasion).
- A full description of the 2013 ABAS survey methodology and further ABAS publications can be found online at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

## References

Ministry of Health. (2014). *New Zealand Health Survey — Annual update of key findings 2013/2014: Adult data tables — Health status, health behaviours and risk factors*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

## Citation

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