

Managing waipiro (alcohol) use during Covid-19

from Ashley Koning, Te Pou Programme Lead – Addiction, 16 April 2020



Alcohol use

Waipiro (alcohol) may be a part of the usual routine of your life. It may normally serve social, recreational and functional purposes for you.

You might find you drink:

- socially with whānau and friends
- at home at the end of a long day or week
- after mowing the lawns
- for special occasions and celebrations
- when you feel lonely and/or bored.



You might drink more than normal when you are:

- on holiday
- tired
- distressed
- stressed
- anxious.



Covid-19

The response to Covid-19 is a strange mix of many of these situations.

For some of us it is an enforced holiday at home, so it evokes some of the feelings of being on holiday. We may also feel anxious about being around other people, being alone, or not knowing how long it will last.

We may feel guilty about not being able to support family members, work colleagues or employees while in lockdown/rahui. Or we may just find it boring not being able to go see mates, do normal outdoor activities or go out at weekends.

For many, especially the casual workforce, it is a time of extreme financial stress and anxiety about surviving. For some, the constant media attention and advice to stay in the bubble and not being able to call on normal face-to-face supports has raised worries about what will happen to us, whānau and friends, especially those who are vulnerable.

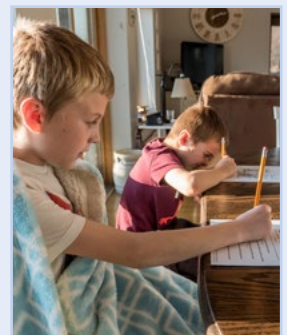


For some, it is going to be busier than ever, especially those in essential health services and those supporting, even remotely, people with mental health and addiction issues.

For people working remotely from home, the pressure of trying to maintain business as usual in a new situation while possibly also juggling parenting and relationships at the same time can be challenging and tiring.

We may swing between all of these states at different times and this can be exhausting and unpredictable.

Enter alcohol, perhaps an old friend, to help with tiredness, loneliness, boredom, anxiety, stress or other feelings.





Risks

As a one-off, alcohol usually carries few risks of short- or long-term harm.

However, in the event of a rahui/ lockdown or other restrictions and high demand of health services, it is possible that alcohol could become a bigger part of how some of us manage how we are feeling.

The trap for all of us is overuse: too much alcohol, or too often.

In the short term, it is possible that being together more than usual might increase tensions in households and within whānau. People may become disinhibited by alcohol, raising the risk of arguments, abuse and domestic violence.

In the medium term, more regular and/or heavier alcohol use could increase tolerance to alcohol, creating the need to drink more for the same effect and increasing the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder.

In the long term, heavier alcohol use can contribute to a wide range of serious physical and mental health issues, including low mood, numerous cancers and heart disease.



Tips for managing

To reduce the risks, each of us should consciously decide now how much and how often we will drink.

Rather than leaving it up to how you 'feel' on any day, make the decision ahead of time. And remember, having something to eat and staying hydrated before or while drinking will make it easier to stick to the decision.

The Health Promotion Agency has useful guidance on both lower-risk drinking [click here](#) and how to 'ease up' on drinking [click here](#).

These resources can help you decide what is reasonable for you as an individual to drink in terms of both amount and frequency, especially in these very strange times.

If you need support or assistance, please contact the alcohol drug helpline on **0800 787 797**.



Source: Alcohol.org.nz