

# Rebel

non-drinking



by Laura Willoughby MBE  
& Cassie Gibson



change your drinking



There is no doubt about it. I drank too much. Each hangover laden morning I did that thing we all do. I thought never again. A little nagging voice in the background also said 'You could never do it. You don't have the willpower. You enjoy going out too much.'

So I am still surprised to this day that I managed to quit. Even more so that I still go out to pubs lots. My social life is in fact better than it was before. Because I remember it and have the energy to do more.

If I could bottle what worked for me I would give it to you I promise. Instead I have set up Club Soda. A place to find what you need to make a change in your drinking, whatever your goal.

Find out what worked for others; experts and perks that can boost your chances of success; be inspired by our events; and join our support programmes.

Cheers

Laura Willoughby MBE

**“Drinking alcohol in the pub is not compulsory.”**



Club Soda helps you change your drinking whether you want to cut down, stop for a bit, quit, or stick.

We bring everything you need in one place. Set your goals, track your progress, join the community, find useful hints and tips, enjoy inspiring events and workshops.

[joinclubsoda.co.uk](http://joinclubsoda.co.uk)

[@joinclubsoda](https://twitter.com/joinclubsoda)



The MOB is our online programme to get you through a Month Off Booze.

Daily emails, webinars, video check-ins and tools to track your progress.

You can do it in your own home, in your own time, or join others for our live online MOB three times a year: January, May and October.

[joinclubsoda.co.uk/the-mob](http://joinclubsoda.co.uk/the-mob)



To get you through a booze-free January we have a 4-week Monday evening MOB Bootcamp in Soho, London.

Also look out for our 0% beer and posh pop tastings, as well as our regular events all year round like the popular How to Quit Drinking workshop.

[joinclubsoda.co.uk/mob-camp](http://joinclubsoda.co.uk/mob-camp)

[joinclubsoda.co.uk/events](http://joinclubsoda.co.uk/events)

# 4 top tactics

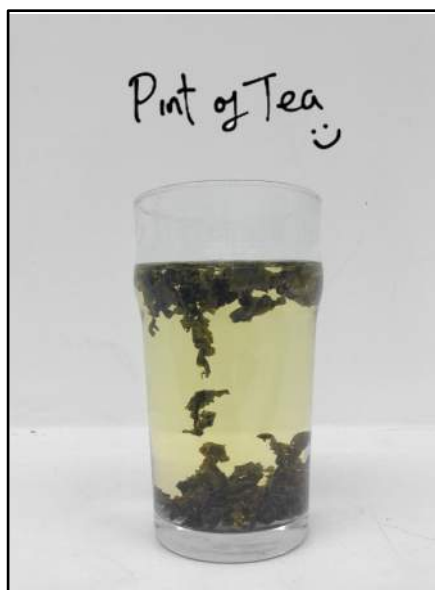
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**1 Take your own** This is actually my top tip, mainly because it sounds more outrageous than it actually is. Bottles of chilled tea, fancy soda and even kombucha - I take my own drink and just grab a glass. It's really easy if your mates are ordering a bottle to share, or just ask for a glass of tap and get a good rehydrating pint of water in before you top it up with your own tipples. No one has ever queried it, mainly because bar staff don't really get paid enough to care. My well rehearsed reply is "you don't serve anything I can drink, but everyone else here is drinking and I am eating/snacking/putting money in the jukebox/improving the view." If they don't like it, then it's a great chance for them to rethink how they accommodate non-drinkers.

**2 The Never Ending Shandy** This sounds a bit like a magic trick, and it almost is in a \*tah dah\* no alcohol sort of way. You get yourself a shandy, and then when it's starting to look a bit low, top it up with more soda. Keep going until you end up drinking a glass of what is basically homeopathic shandy.

**3 'T&T'** This is another one for faking it. A gin and tonic looks exactly the same as a tonic and tonic. And the recent gin craze has resulted in a parallel explosion of interesting tonics. You can have your tonic with the addition of cardamon, elderflower, or lemon and rosemary. If you usually have a mixed drink, well who's to say there's no vodka in your coke? If you have a diet coke it even tastes pretty much like a vodka and coke.

**4 Pimp your water** Wouldn't it be amazing if you could actually come out of the pub healthier, rather than slightly stumbling and desperately in search of a kebab? Such are the wondrous prospects offered up by not drinking. Alcohol can deplete all kinds of vitamins and minerals, so why not do the opposite and stock up on nutrients? You can't necessarily bring in a blender and whip up a kale smoothie, but why not take some soluble vitamins to pimp your drink for the evening? Tap water is simple, free and easily available. If that sounds a bit uninspiring, you can try bringing a little of your favourite cordial, or even some tea leaves: you should be able to get a glass of hot water and then you're good to go. A pint of tea at the table also makes starting a conversation easy if you're worried about socialising sober!



# Plan

Check out the drink menu online →

Right, I'm going to dive straight into the really exciting stuff. Planning your night out. So the key things to consider here are people, place and prep. Isn't it neat how nicely that alliterates?

## People

Other people have the potential to be your biggest non-drinking pitfall. What are the group you are going out with like? Are they just looking to get drunk? Is there an event that will give you something to focus on beyond drinking and your non-drinking? Is

there anyone there who is going to make your not drinking a bigger issue than it needs to be? Consider whether this is going to be a fun night out, or if you'd be better off arranging something else that you will enjoy more. We highly recommend going out and being social, but start thinking about how you can squeeze more of what you actually enjoy into your evening.

## Place

So, where are you going? Pub, conference, meal, sophisticated soiree? Do you know what non-alcoholic options are on offer? If you're going to an event why not email them in advance and ask what they've got? If you let them know there's a need for a really good non-alcoholic option they are likely to try and help you out. They want you to have a good time and it's in their interest to be helpful. Or why not plan to go somewhere you already know has great non-alcoholic options. Do some research and find a place that you know will have something you want to drink, then suggest meeting your friends there. Lots of pubs have their drinks menu online, which makes things simple, and there are lots of really nice cocktail bars that have great mocktail selections.

## Prep

It's worth thinking through what you are hoping to get out of this night, whether there's anything you need to bring (tea, cordial, vitamins) and what your exit strategy is. Would you actually quite like to go out for a couple of hours and then go home and get a good night's sleep? You don't have to, but it's all about working out what you actually want to do, and hanging out with a bunch of increasingly drunk people into the early hours isn't necessarily the best way of socialising. Unless you want to dance will dawn, in which case do that! Additionally, what are you going to tell people? Are you driving for example? Do you need an excuse for not drinking? Are you going to fake it to avoid discussing the non-issue or just be upfront? There is no right answer, but it's good to be prepared.

NON-ALCOHOLICS	
THE ROSE PETAL .....	£4.00
Rose petals shaken with cranberry juice, apple juice and strawberry syrup. Served straight up.	
MELON & GRAPE COOLER .....	£4.00
Galia Melon, black grapes, violet syrup, apple, cranberry and lemon.	
VIRGIN MOJITO .....	£4.00
Fresh mint, lime juice, apple juice and sugar, served long over crushed ice, topped up with ginger beer.	
KIWI HONEY CRUSH .....	£4.00
Fresh kiwi, honey and gingerbread syrup shaken with apple juice, pineapple juice and lime.	

**Excuses** Here's a list of excuses you can use if you feel so inclined:

- ☀ Driving
- ☀ Got to be up early (for work, kids, jog, etc)
- ☀ On meds
- ☀ Overtired
- ☀ Too hungover
- ☀ Too ill
- ☀ My food order is coming from [insert suitable supermarket here] so I need to be back early
- ☀ Because I'm not drinking tonight [there's nothing wrong with going simple and to the point!]



# Resist

After two drinks no one notices what you are drinking. The more people drink, the less they care about what you are drinking. Once you have said no to the first drink, it gets easier. You will start to see the effects on everyone else - and you can flash forward to their foggy head tomorrow and feel a little bit smug!

## Pushy People

Honestly, you would think you were drinking virgin's blood, not a coke! Some people make it seem like you have personally let them down by choosing not to drink. Don't get defensive, if they won't take a simple explanation don't get drawn in. Try and turn the subject, or if necessary make an excuse and go talk to someone else. Remember it's your choice, not theirs and you don't owe them an explanation beyond 'I don't drink'.

## FOMO

Sometimes when we're not drinking, or if we decide to have an early night, we might suffer from a case of Fear Of Missing Out. Ok, maybe you're having a decent time now, but would you be having an even better time if you were drinking? What will you miss if you go home now?

The important thing is to focus not on what you might be missing out on, but on what you are gaining. A laugh tonight versus going to the gym in the morning? You can have anything you want, but you can't have everything! So, focus on what's important to you now.

# Demand

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I have worked way too many customer service jobs to have any patience with the idea that 'the customer is always right'. But I also know that businesses want happy satisfied customers. If you have a local pub, they will want to keep you as their customer. Full stop. They will often go out of their way to help you out with your non-drinking - as long as you ask (which is a way of being demanding!).

They are after all a business, and businesses like to sell things. It is no good for them if you grumpily sip the tap water from the jug at the end of the bar all night. They would rather you shell out £3 for a craft soda and have a great time!

So I encourage you to be a demanding customer. Here are some tips to get you started:

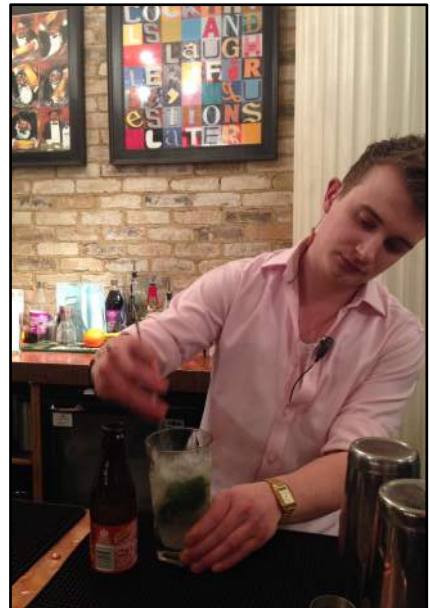
**1 Don't panic** Take your time. The biggest moment of panic and indecision, whether you are drinking alcohol or not, is when you are asked what you want to drink. Silly really that this helpful and obliging question should make us stutter and panic and fall back on old favourites. So when you are asked that question, take a breath, and don't be afraid to engage the bar staff in a conversation. You can take a minute to decide on your order and get it right. You can say something like:

**“I would like something non-alcoholic, but not too sweet/a little-bit-special/grown-up/that looks like vodka?”**

They will do what they can to help you out, and you will learn more about what you can order.

*We asked him to make us a really nice mocktail and he did!*

*Bath Social Feb 15*



**2 Don't be afraid to ask** Ask what they have, and be a bit insistent. The chances are that they will have something nice at the very bottom left hand side of the fridge furthest away from you. So whilst they will start with the cheap coke and lemonade on the pump, you know they can do better than that - challenge them!



**3 Come here often?** Then ask them to get what you want in for you. "Would you mind getting me in a few bottles of that nice Tannenzäpfle 0% beer for when I come in? I'd like my friends to try it too." Demonstrate that if they stock it you will buy it.

**4 Give them a chance to show off** and help them get to know their cocktail ingredients (a selfless act). Ask the bar staff about what ingredients they've got. If they make cocktails (and many places do these days) they can probably make you a virgin version of whatever you fancy. If they have bitters you can add them to almost anything to make a non-alcoholic drink that skirts the whole 'it's too sweet' issue. We also like adding bitters of all kinds to tonic for a very non-kid-friendly non-alcoholic drink.

**5 Know they don't have it?** Ask anyway. And then maybe even tweet about it. If they don't know it's in demand they will never stock it. Do your bit for the non-drinkers that come after you!



# Fake it!

Sometimes it's worth 'faking it' a little, just to avoid a boring discussion about the merits/demerits of sobriety. So here are a few ideas for flying below the radar as a secret non-drinker:

**1 Drink in hand** The easiest way to fake drinking is just to have a drink in your hand. So show up 5 minutes early and get your drink in first. You can even ask the bar staff to keep your drinks virgin all night, or set up a prearranged 'usual' if you want to keep your non-drinking under wraps. I have talked to many bar staff. They know this trick already, and will conspire with their customers to make it happen!

**2 Never ending shandy** This comes straight from our member Rob, who gets the lowest strength pint he can find, and then tops it up with lemonade for the rest of the evening. Ok, his first few sips are boozy - but you can do it your way. Get a low alcohol wine and make a never ending spritzer. If you're cutting down rather than quitting, having half a glass of alcohol for the evening is still pretty good going.

**3 Turning down a drink** Once you've got your drink, your standard response can be a simple 'I've got a drink thanks', or you can ask for a soft drink and let them think you're alternating between alcoholic/non-alcoholic drinks. This also gives them a chance to be generous and include you in a round. You can still buy other people drinks as well (I know that doesn't immediately sound like a bonus). Be generous and people are less likely to mind whether you drink or not.

**4 Take your own** Like I said in the intro - this is my top tip, mainly because it sounds more outrageous than it actually is. But the reality is that when there is no alcohol involved you are fussier about what you want to drink. It's unlikely a pub will have the drink you like the most. So a guaranteed way to be sure is to sort-it-yourself!





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**5 Bitters** are basically the answer to the 'non-alcoholic drinks taste like they are for kids' problem. I like them mixed with tonic or ginger beer and lime cordial, but you can pretty much add them to whatever you feel like. Most places will have Angostura bitters, but if you're lucky or pick your location well, they might have some more exotic offerings like chocolate, cherry or peach. Just make sure they don't go crazy. You only need a few drops!

**6 Getting rid of a drink** If someone does buy you a drink, don't feel that you have to drink it. Just carry it round for a bit, and then pour it away or leave it somewhere. If someone gets really carried away and starts buying shots, just tell them that if you do a shot you will probably hurl. Even your most drunkenly enthusiastic friends are unlikely to force you to drink yourself sick. And if they are, then why exactly are you hanging out with these people anyway?

## Events

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Not every occasion is a night with mates in the pub. For different types of nights out you may need to deploy some site-specific tactics:

### Dinner out

I won't tell you how much I hate it when the sommelier/wine waiter leaves the table once I have told them I am not having wine. So if you are somewhere fancy pants, do be insistent about asking what they have that will pair nicely with your food. If you get annoyed like me, you can use my complaint letter templates from the Club Soda website. Lemonade kills nice meals. Fact! And if you're less bolshy? Here are some options:

Take your own de-alcoholised wine and ask them to chill it/open it for you. Unless they have one of their own on the menu this is not unreasonable.

You will never miss a flavour if you eat your meal with water. Upgrade to bottled or fizzy if you are in the mood, and celebrate with a non-alcoholic mocktail after dinner.

And remember: drinking tap water rather than wine probably reduces the cost of your meal so much that you can afford to order an extra dessert - so do it!



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## Nightclubs and festivals

This is a complicated one, as not all nightclubs and festivals are the same. Some are not boozy at all. But people do drink in clubs to boost their confidence and deal with tiredness - after all, everyone needs something to keep them awake if they are planning to dance till the wee small hours. Here are some tips:

**Prep** We keep repeating this, but planning makes hard things easier. If you are going for a late one, have a disco nap or squeeze in some mindfulness beforehand - you will get in the mood, and will also be able to focus on the hangover-free day after the end of the booze-free night.

**Focus on the dancing** If everyone else is pissed, they won't notice what your moves look like. It's really just as good for your inhibitions as being drunk yourself, in fact you probably dance better. So focus on the reason you have gone, and get the most out of the tunes.

**Top up on caffeine and then hit the water** - it's the best remedy for tiredness if you want to party till dawn.

**Do the fake vodka and tonic trick** and just get the tonic or fizzy water. The bar staff won't care, and your mates won't notice. Studies show that when you're around people who are drinking, you're likely to unconsciously match their sipping pattern - so having something in your hand helps.

**Watch people enjoy themselves** It's energising and enjoyable. And be glad you are not one of the people puking in the loos!

## Receptions and do's

Whether you are going to an event or to a friends, ask about non-alcoholic options when you RSVP. Think of it like being a vegetarian; most people will work to accommodate your dietary needs, as long as you aren't making absurd impossible requests. I have done this quite a few times, and then enjoyed myself immensely noticing how many people are drinking the fancy non-alcoholic offering I've asked for.

**Wedding, award, celebration?** Here we like to channel J-Lo: "raise the glass, take a minute sip" and then put it down. Feel proud that you looked the part and will continue to look the part for the rest of the evening!



# Reward

Good job, congratulations on your sober night out! Don't you think you deserve a reward? Well it turns out you're getting one anyway.

**Benefits you are getting anyway** The obvious and best reward is that you get to be in control of your relationship with alcohol, you will feel better, and you will wake up tomorrow hangover-free. Oh, and you still have a social life. Even better, you are learning all the time about how to socialise without alcohol. As a society, we fall back on using alcohol as a shortcut to being social, but by going out and doing it sans-alcohol you are learning how to be confident and fun without a drink in hand. Doesn't that sound like it would come in handy?

**Rewarding yourself when you are there** I used to go to a pub that had a skittles machine. This was a great idea, because there is nothing 18-year-olds like more than skittles and vodka. But the point is that you can indulge in something different whilst you are there - whether it's a great mocktail, or something from the dessert menu, or the homemade pork scratchings, or, yes, maybe it's skittles. You can even sneak in some treats. There's no need to be overly puritanical. Think of all those alcohol calories you've saved on.



**Planning rewards for when you get home** If you need a further reward, you can always plan something really awesome for when you get home. Is there a movie you've been wanting to see? How about some late night hot chocolate with marshmallows? Or eating an entire bag of Haribo in the bath? Don't be afraid of missing out, stay as long as you want to stay, and then go and do whatever it is you want to do. One of the great things about giving up drinking is how much time you can free up, but one of the pitfalls can be utilising that free time. You don't have to spend it exercising, reading War and Peace or learning French. You can do any and all of those things (and yay for you if you do!), but it's also important to make sure you are still putting aside time for yourself, where you don't do anything particularly worthy at all.

Good luck and let us know how it goes!



change your drinking

“We get pissed  
together.

So why should  
we get sober  
alone?”

by Laura Willoughby MBE & Cassie Gibson

with pints of help from Jussi Tolvi, Claire Malaika  
Tunnacliffe, Helen O'Connor & Zed Gregory

front cover from [streetartutopia.com](http://streetartutopia.com)  
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