

Dating (or Hanging Out) While Sober: How to Pass Up Booze Without Passing on Love

With the holidays coming, parties and alcohol are more prevalent than ever. Plus ours is a society of drinking, and in Silicon Valley wine is not just drinking: it's an art. My husband is a construction superintendent for high-end residential building and new houses all have wine cellars that hold 1500 or more bottles.

What if there are reasons you don't drink or don't want to drink. Maybe you're a recovering alcoholic, maybe your partner is worried about your drinking, maybe you're worried about your drinking, maybe you've been depressed and know that alcohol is a depressant. So how do you go about dating someone new, or enjoy time with your family, friends and work associates? I hope you'll feel good about having a club soda with lime and not let any questions from others get to you; this is your life after all.

Here are tips on how to pass on booze but not on love, from Dr. Duy Nguyen, D.O., a Board-Certified Psychiatrist Beachway Therapy Center, a drug and alcohol rehab in Boynton Beach, Florida.

"When it comes to dating, "let's grab a drink" is often the go to first date invitation. Many opt to cure first date jitters with a libation or two to "chill out" and feel more comfortable. What happens if you are a recovering alcoholic and you can't opt for "liquid courage" to get you through

those awkward dating moments? For approximately 30-million Americans who identify as recovering from alcohol abuse, dating while sober is often a tricky reality.

1. Take the lead and suggest a dry date.

The easiest way to maintain sobriety is to avoid situations where alcohol is present. Having several alcohol-free dating options already in mind can empower you to steer the date in a dry direction more easily. Opt for daytime dates that are more activity focused, get you outside enjoying quality time together away from any bar. "Doing activities that aren't conducive to drinking such as museums, galleries, fairs, and festivals could be fun. People who don't drink often are the most creative when it comes to choosing fun dates," says Dr. Nguyen.

2. Create your new story and get honest.

In the spirit of 12-step recovery, which emphasizes the importance of self-honesty, aim for truthfulness in how you present yourself. If an on-line dating profile questionnaire asks how much you drink, don't let fear about what others may think prevent you from checking the "Never" box. "Frame out when and how you plan to reveal what inspired your decision not to drink. Simply saying that you no longer drink alcohol is enough in the beginning. When you get to know someone better then share your story from a place of an achievement you're proud of," Dr. Nguyen encourages.

3. Get clear on what you want in a partner.

If someone has an issue with you not drinking, then they clearly aren't the right person for you and that's okay. Decide if you would prefer to date someone who understands recovery, may even have been through it themselves or is a health enthusiast who also doesn't drink.

Dr. Nguyen says that, “While there are a lot of benefits to dating those in recovery, it can also lead to risky situations. There are often times in which one partner relapses and the other follows, although this isn’t a guarantee.”

If you decide that you want to date non-recovering people, it’s best to have some clean time under your belt and be solid in your recovery, as this can lead to tempting situations.

4. Trust your gut, nerves can be a good indicator!

Your nerves could very well be indicating that there is something there. That is, chemistry. Dr. Nguyen says, “Alcohol typically dulls our sensory and emotional experience so without it we’re open to the raucous disarray of emotions that warp us when we’re under the spell of a potential new love. Of course, that doesn’t make the experience of a new relationship any easier. Try to reframe the experience in a way that embraces these jitters.”

5. Don’t make love the new addiction.

On top of the excitement that comes with meeting a potential new partner, scientifically we produce numerous hormones that can increase that excitement. “A new relationship can very much become a replacement drug,” says Dr. Nguyen. He adds, “Many confuse infatuation with love, so it’s a good idea is to take it slowly. Again, make sure that you are at a place emotionally that can handle all of the new feelings that come with dating and be prepared if relationships don’t end the way you expected.”

6. Embrace the awkward.

“Being sober will probably increase the number of awkward

pauses, says Dr. Nguyen. "We're sharper and more present when we're not drinking which can actually be used as an advantage to navigate conversation and ask the other person about themselves which enables a deeper connection and more trust," he adds.

7. Keep first dates short.

The majority of first dates that extend into the wee hours of the morning are alcohol fueled and can lead to unintended promiscuity. Dr. Nguyen suggests going into the date with a self-imposed time frame in mind, two to three hours and then making another date if there's interest. For a recovering alcoholic, especially someone in early sobriety, being "forced" to bar hop will be like white knuckling it on a scary roller coaster."