

The sobering truth about drinking alcohol at Christmas

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☒ From a woman who was once an alcoholic...the sobering truth about drinking at Christmas:

The time is 8pm and I am standing in the middle of a crowded bar. A young man with a red sweaty face and pair of flashing antlers on his head is swaggering across the room.

'Come on darlin',' he slurs, lurching towards me. Just as he tries to plant a slobbery wet kiss on my lips, he trips, knocks me over and is sick all over his designer suit.

Here we go again. As the Christmas party season gets under way a sort of national anarchy is sweeping across the country, taking over the erstwhile uptight Brits and turning them into drunken idiots.

I am always astounded by the effect a bit of yuletide spirit can have. As soon as the obligatory round of parties starts, instead of a few drinks to get merry, most people seem hell-bent on oblivion. And this is not young jobs I'm talking about, it is professional men and women in their 30s and 40s.

Why do otherwise sane individuals suddenly feel compelled to make such fools of themselves at office parties?

I don't want to be a killjoy, but there is too much emphasis on booze during the party season. We never hear about the Italians mooning at passers-by, starting fights, or falling over total strangers as a yuletide ritual.

Don't get me wrong, I don't want to end the tradition of drinking at this time of year. All the same, I think it's getting out of hand.

Instead of **alcohol** being a pleasant facilitator, getting steaming drunk has become the sole reason to drink for millions. As far as I am concerned, the line between having a drink and binge drinking is crossed all too frequently.

And I should know. I am a former drunk myself - though I have not touched alcohol for 15 years.

As a young journalist, I would down a bottle of wine at lunch and often keep going on gin and tonics until I passed out at 3am in a club in the West End.

Dancing on tables at five in the morning was de rigueur, as was blacking out and waking up in a pool of vomit.

Yet - and here's the rub - while heavy drinking at any other time of year took a heavy toll on my health and social life (I nearly lost all my friends), come December I was virtually lost to the world amid an avalanche of excess.

Psychologists call it legitimised deviancy, an unspoken rule that the normal laws of civility and morality are tossed aside at key points in the national calendar.

We become a nation of pie-eyed workers, swaying down the street, swigging back wine from a bottle and urinating against the wall.

Though I may have been a statistical aberration when I was drinking - especially among young women - I would certainly not be now.

Not only do hospital casualty departments fill up at this time of year with people who have injured themselves after drinking too much, experts say that binge drinking by young people is contributing to an increase in deaths before middle age.

Our heavy drinking culture, which goes into overdrive at this time of year, is, according to some doctors, going to do more harm than smoking ever did.

Did you know that alcohol-fuelled deaths doubled in just over a decade before 2004, according to the Office for National Statistics? Or that the NHS has recorded a 37 per cent rise in deaths from alcoholic liver disease in the past five years alone?

The horrifying truth is that respectable businessmen, middle-aged women and just about everyone else suddenly feels they can drink to excess and everything is all right.

As a former drunk who is now sober, it is especially shocking and depressing for me because I know all too well how catastrophic the effects can be, not only physically but in the psychological fallout from casual sex.

When I was drinking, I woke up in bed with strange men and wondered how the hell I got there. And I still don't want to think about the toll those years of alcohol abuse took on my body. Sometimes I think it's a miracle I survived that time of my life at all.

That's why I hate to see people - and especially women - drinking themselves senseless now. The plain truth is, we Brits cannot hold our liquor.

For instance, a recent evening out ended up with somebody I know getting into a fight, to protect my honour.

I was at a private club with some friends. A group of rowdy post-party revellers were in the middle of the room invading everyone else's space.

Suddenly one of the men fell forward and knocked a bottle of red wine all over my dress and a pair of satin Prada shoes I had just bought.

Not only did he not apologise, when I insisted he pay for the dry-cleaning bill, he threw the rest of the wine in my face.

His friends thought it was hilarious, my gentleman companion had no option but to hit him and we just escaped a trip to the A&E. This is the worst part. Instead of the man being berated by his own pals for ruining my dress and my evening, I was given a hard time for making a fuss. It was me who was sober, and me who was berated for being a party pooper.

The truth of the matter is that most people drink, and the non-drinking brigade get a bad reputation.

It is not surprising, because when you are in the minority these days who don't drink, you become unsettling to those who are knocking back the pink fizz.

I have lost count of the times I have been struck off people's New Year's Eve party list just because they can't get their heads round the fact that I will be on the apple juice instead of the bubbly.

And those who do invite me spend the whole evening tutting as they pass me clutching a glass of water.

Still there is one recompense: come New Year's Day, I will be one of the few people in this country without a hangover or a body covered in bruises. Perhaps sobriety is not such a big price to pay after all. [Read More](#)

Want to find more information on how to stop drinking then visit

<http://www.stopdrinkingadvice.org/>

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