

Alcohol: the drug we will not talk about

Published: January 15, 2026, 1:53 am

I have never understood why anyone needs to get drunk to watch a football match. People have tried to explain it to me, but they have never made sense.

This observation is obviously relevant in the context of yesterday's Euro 2024 final. What astonishes me is that pubs expected to pull an additional 10,000,000 pints as a result of that, whilst there appears to be a widespread feeling that being late to work this morning, when suffering with a hangover, will be acceptable.

I am not trying to deny people choice. And I am not teetotal, and never intend to be. However, over the last year or so I have considerably reduced my alcohol consumption, which was never that much. This has been assisted, in part, by discovering that there are some very good very low alcohol beers now that offer at least as much flavour as conventional beers, and are usually significantly better with food than many wines are.

The process of reducing my alcohol intake has, as a consequence, been partly by accident rather than design, but the benefits have been obvious. I have felt fitter, and less tired. This has been particularly true in the evening. If I had a glass of wine with a meal in the past I would feel sluggish for the rest of the day. I now have energy for much longer.

There is, of course, medical evidence to support the fact that alcohol is a drug as well as being a substance that is decidedly harmful to our health. That means alcohol is much more detrimental to our well-being than many banned substances. Its impact on demand for NHS services is also significant, and is now much greater than that from tobacco. It could also be having a negative impact on economic productivity, and much else in life.

However, this issue is almost never discussed. More than that, if you mention that you are not drinking, or are looking for low alcohol alternatives without having the obvious excuses of driving or pregnancy to use, then there is a definite social convention to treat you as quite strange. If you could describe yourself as a recovering alcoholic then people would understand. If you explained that the objection was religious, again, there

would be comprehension. If, however, you simply suggest you've chosen not to drink because of the negative impacts of alcohol the consequence is that you take the risk of causing offence, because the person hearing you does not want to acknowledge the possibility that these risks might exist.

For the government, if it wanted to cut NHS costs whilst simultaneously increasing growth in the UK, cutting alcohol consumption would be a very obvious thing to do. The country would, quite simply, be better off as a result. We would also live longer, and more healthily. At the same time, the rate of crime in society would reduce, and many pointless deaths would be avoided. I am aware that young people are now drinking less. They seem to have discovered the truth that so far their parents have not acknowledged.

I watched the football, but alcohol was not involved.

The country would be better off if that link was broken.

My question is why, outside Scotland, has this issue not been discussed by politicians?