



# Just one more...

**STEVEN SPARLING COUNTS UP THE EMPTIES – AND REACHES A SOBERING CONCLUSION...**

**Shhh! Could you keep it down a bit? No, really... just lower the lights – and would you make me a cup of tea? Extra sugar.**

I'm feeling a little bit delicate today. Delicate would probably translate as 'hung over' in any other language. Last night I got together with some friends I haven't seen for a while, and we put away multiple bottles of wine, switching from red to white and back to red without a care in the world. There may even have been some rosé. Laughing, having a good time. It's all good, right?

Except today my head hurts. My mouth is dry. And I didn't sleep well. Did I mention it was a school night, so now I am really struggling to get some work done?

Two nights ago, I was at the opening of a new restaurant and... guess what? The Pimm's was flowing and the food was hardly sufficient, so the drinks slid down too quickly. Oh, and the night before that it was a bottle of wine with another friend while we caught up on life. The night before that was a bottle with my husband over dinner, and then there was the bottle on Saturday night and the several glasses on Friday night in the pub.

You can see a pattern emerging here, can't you? Does this sound anything like your own life?

**It has slowly dawned on me that I drink alcohol almost every single day now.**

I wouldn't say it's a lot – probably an average of two glasses of wine per night with an occasional bender every two months. But a day without even a drop of alcohol has become more and more rare.

I don't think I have a problem, but then I do notice

now that I start to crave booze around 3 or 4pm every day. There's that moment when the phone is ringing or one more email pops into my box where I smack my lips and think: "I sure could do with a G&T".

I usually hold out until later – I do have a job to do after all – but that glass comes more often than not by about 6 or 7pm.



*"I often console myself by thinking that my daily wine habit is simply 'European'..."*

**Recently, the husband and I went to spend the weekend with some French friends living outside Paris.** We were there for four days and nights.

Each day at about 5pm we would have a pastis (or sometimes two). Then with our starter, the four of us would share one bottle of white wine. With our main, we would share a further bottle of red wine. And that was it. When dinner

was over, coffee was served and no more alcohol was seen. I realised how different this is to having dinner with friends here in London where four of us would regularly get through at least four bottles of wine plus extra gin, vodka and/or Baileys.

So, while I often console myself by thinking that my daily wine habit is simply 'European', I don't think my

*problems aren't alcoholics. They're simply people who have regularly drunk more than the recommended levels for some years.*

The NHS recommendation is that men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units per day. Looking at the unit calculator tells me that a typical evening's consumption of one gin and tonic and two glasses of white wine totals 5-6 units, which is exceeding my recommended daily amount. But what about the evenings when I consume more? The NHS site goes on to point out:

*And it's certainly not only people who get drunk or binge drink that are at risk. Most people who regularly drink more than the NHS recommends don't see any harmful effects at first.*

*Alcohol's hidden harms usually only emerge after a number of years. And by then, serious health problems can have developed.*

I have to say that this makes for sober reading. As do the recent news reports revealing a dramatic increase in alcohol-related liver disease in the under-30s – up by 50% in the last 10 years. Alcohol-related health problems do not only strike in middle-age or later life.

**I enjoy drinking alcohol. I like the taste, I like the feelings associated with it and I like that it is a social thing you share with friends.**

But I hadn't ever really thought through the implications that if a male regularly consumes more than 3-4 units per day he is 1.8-2.5 times more likely to get cancer of the mouth, neck and throat; twice as likely to develop cirrhosis; and 1.8 times more likely to develop high blood pressure. And that's from only drinking more than 1½ glasses of wine per day.

With that knowledge, does it still taste as good? ●

European brethren are putting away the quantities of alcohol that we are in the UK. And I actually think that I drink less than most people I know... or are those the words of a delusional alcoholic?

**Out of curiosity, I've just visited the NHS website to be confronted with this gem:**

*Most people who have alcohol-related health*