



Sip Happens: Why Gen Z is Toasting Less

All surveys point to the same conclusion: while overall alcohol consumption is on the rise, it's declining among Gen Z. To understand why more Gen Zers are choosing to abstain from alcohol, we delved into the perspectives of young people across the USA — specifically in Illinois, California, New York, and Florida. Through 100 in-depth interviews, analyzed by [Quals.AI](#), we uncovered a wealth of insights.



Gen Z's Cool New Buzz Is Sobriety!

Gen Z is dramatically rethinking alcohol, with moderation, responsibility, and well-being leading the way. But the “why” is way more complex (and interesting) than you think!

***What's up:** Gen Z isn't anti-fun—they just want to remember the night! The new cool is being in control.*

***Hot Take:** Health, sanity, and self-respect are way trendier than stumbling home barefoot.*



The Vibe Check

Alcohol is totally okay—just not as your main event. For Gen Z, drinking is about savoring the moment, not washing it away. Binge drinking is out; a toast with friends is in.

“Fun” and “relaxation” are still associated, but so are “danger” and “depression.” Social drinking is still a thing, but not a necessity.



"I think it's okay in moderation and in social situations. Overconsumption of alcohol is one of the worst vices a human can have." (Male, 24, CA)

"I think alcohol consumption can be very dangerous." (Female, 27, CA)

"It's alright long as drinking smartly." (Male, 23, NY)



From Happy Hour to Hangxiety and Everything Between

Drinking brings short-term happiness, but often regret, sadness, or anxiety later. Not drinking is equated with clarity, control, and, for some, pride. Many have seen negative emotional changes in others caused by alcohol.

A blurred background image of a woman wearing a red party hat with white polka dots, smiling. In the foreground, there is a blue party hat on a table and a clear glass of water.

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*“It makes me more depressed and sad.”
(Female, 28, CA)*

*“I associate celebration with consuming and
abstinence with not consuming.” (Male, 26, FL)*

*“Drinking alcohol is a way to self medicate for
various reasons...It’s an easy way to escape
reality and feel better.” (Female, 27, CA)*



When Home Is Where the Story Starts

Family history of alcoholism or witnessing abuse is a key driver for moderation or abstinence. Nothing kills a party like a family history of addiction, DUIs, or late-night drama. This generation knows: you don't have to repeat the past



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“My dad’s DUIs and abusive behavior.” (Male, 25, CA)

“My father grew up 100% alcohol-free, due to his values, which I believe has something to do with his father being an alcohol salesman.” (Female, 27, IL)

“My dad, three uncle and my neighbor died from alcohol.” (Female, 28, CA)



Fit Is the New Lit: Health Trumps Hangover

Fears about liver damage, cancer, and depression motivate abstinence. Chasing a healthy glow is cooler than chasing shots.

Gen Zers want to run faster, sleep better, and feel lighter—so passing up that extra drink is a power move.




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“My health comes first before alcohol consumption.” (Male, 26, NY)

“I want to be in shape. I want to have good sleep. I want to be able to enjoy life through my own eyes, not alcohol.” (Male, 23, NY)

“It destroys your liver and can lead to depression.” (Female, 29, CA)

A woman with curly hair is shown in profile, holding a green beer bottle. Another person's hand is visible in the foreground, reaching out towards her. The background is a warm, out-of-focus setting.

The Peer Pressure Paradox:
Sip Happens...But Only If I Want It To
Peer/family pressure exists, but Gen Z is confident in declining. This is the generation of drawing boundaries and sticking to them. Many describe a shift toward respecting personal choices. Social drinking is less “expected” than in previous generations.



*"I don't have any qualms about drinking in general, and even if everyone around me is drinking, if I don't feel like it, I will not drink."
(Male, 24, CA)*

*"I have a strong will and determination."
(Female, 27, FL)*

"My choice to abstain is respected." (Male, 22, NY)



SOBER LIVING

Influencers, TikTok Trends & the Rise of Sober Curiosity

Influencers and sober movements on social media are normalizing non-drinking. Some see social posts glamorizing alcohol—but many more see #SoberIsCool content. Friends' online behaviors influence drinking habits, for better or worse.

“Sober Living

“I follow lots of social media influencers who are helping me a ton to achieve my goals.” (Male, 24, CA)

“I like to see activities that involve no drinking and listening to podcasts.” (Female, 27, CA)

“If they're people who drink a lot, or promote it, you will feel more inclined to drink socially, or more regularly, or perhaps when that social media influencer does.” (Male, 23, CA)



Sober Is the New Status Symbol

Many report being praised for sobriety but occasionally judged as "boring." Gen Z rebrands sobriety as self-control, confidence, and—let's be real—having the best stories (because they remember them all).



"Some see me as boring, others praise me for not drinking." (Female, 25, CA)

"I feel good, because I prioritize my health first." (Male, 27, NY)

"For me it's good because it keeps my image clean cut." (Male, 23, IL)

A group of cyclists are riding on a paved road. The lead cyclist is in the foreground, wearing a black and green jersey and a black helmet. Behind him, several other cyclists are visible, some wearing colorful jerseys and helmets. The background shows a clear blue sky with large white clouds and some trees in the distance.

Redefining Fun: Mocktails Over Margaritas?

Special occasions are still a time for a drink, but not a requirement. Many have found new ways to celebrate or unwind without alcohol. The ritual of drinking is being replaced with other habits (e.g., fitness, hobbies).




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“I only drink alcohol on special occasions only. I would drink 1 or 2 beers, that’s it.” (Male, 27, NY)

“I learned to have fun without drinking during my pregnancy.” (Female, 28, FL)

“I only drink on special occasions to show myself how much stronger I’ve become.” (Male, 23, NY)



Regional Flavors – State-by-State Sips

California: Heavy emphasis on mental health, fitness, and cultural diversity influences.

Florida: Moderation for “fun,” but less overt pressure; more stories about family, less about peer groups.

New York: Strong educational and PSA impact; party culture is observed but not always joined.

Illinois: Health, cost, and personal/family trauma are big motivators; practical and “self-care” attitude prevails.

A young man and woman with curly hair are smiling and looking at each other in a bar or restaurant setting. The man is wearing a dark jacket over a light shirt, and the woman is wearing a light-colored top and a colorful beaded necklace. The background shows shelves with bottles and a warm, dimly lit atmosphere.

Implications & Recommendations

Health, mental well-being, and social image are at the forefront of Gen Z's drinking choices. Family history, negative personal experiences, and cost are powerful motivators to abstain or moderate.

Gen Z has shifted the narrative: Drinking is an option, not a default. Brands take note—offer choices, respect autonomy, and highlight health! Differences by state highlight the importance of local context when crafting messages or products.



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