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Why exercise is a good idea on your next holiday ■ P6



Quitting time

Zero-proof culture is redefining happy hour. **Graham Isador** discovers new ways to unwind after work ■ P4

PLUS: Five ready-made, non-alcoholic drinks to enjoy this summer and why restaurants are crafting sober menus

Change management

Graham Isador explores alternatives for turning off work brain without turning to the bottle

When I was growing up, my dad always marked the transition from workday to evening with a cocktail. I got the impression this ritual was as much about the act as the alcohol – a way to signify that it was time to relax. Any more work could wait until tomorrow.

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about that habit. I'm notoriously bad at turning off my work brain, reflexively checking my e-mail whenever there's a notification and opening my notes app to scribble down any hint of a story idea after hours. I worry it's annoying to my friends (and especially my girlfriend), making it feel like I'm less than present during our time together. The nightly highball ritual has its appeal, a wind down to show it's time to chill. Was that something I should try to incorporate into my life?

But I've been trying to limit my alcohol intake to a few times a month while I work on some fitness goals. And I'm not the only one cutting back. Canadians are buying less booze. According to Statistics Canada, on a volume basis, sales of alcohol declined by 3.8 per cent in 2023/2024 – the largest volume decline since the agency started tracking sales in 1949.

For me, a little buzz from a postwork drink is less important than the actual act of the wind down.

"A wind-down ritual can help us create a boundary which allows for a more mindful and intentional separation between work and quote/unquote life," said Naomi Midanik, an Ontario-based registered psychotherapist specializing in work-life balance and corporate burnout. Midanik noted that activities such as movement and stretching can be helpful to settle the nervous system. Light exercise might also work. But above all else, finding a practice you'll actually follow is key.

"A ritual can be anything. While something like a daily cold plunge or sound bath might seem like a great idea, it's more important that people find something they can do consistently."

Trying to find a wind down away from alcohol, I asked a number of influential folks in the wellness, travel and tourism spaces how they might start a wind-down habit without booze. Here are a few ideas.



GET REALLY INTO BREWING TEA

For serious tea lovers, a perfectly steeped cup can be a meticulous, multistep process. Measuring the leaves, boiling water to the precise recommended temperature – and waiting for the perfect brew gives the practice a zen quality for enthusiasts.

Sarah Wilcox says a few minutes of focused time dedicated to making tea is a quiet daily highlight. "Part of it is the brewing of the tea is slowing down and taking a moment for myself," said the co-founder of the Canadian-owned Genuine Tea. "It gets to be a bit of a ritual."

Unless you're looking for a late night, a non-caffeinated tea such as chamomile or mint is your best bet. After dinner, it's a chance to focus and be intentional with the desire to slow down. "The habit used to be grabbing that glass of wine or a cup of whisky, but for people trying to have a healthier option, tea is such an amazing choice," Wilcox said.



TRY NATURE BATHING

When I first heard the term nature bathing, I was pretty skeptical. A wellness rebranding of hiking felt unnecessary. But a forest-bathing excursion during a recent Japanese vacation changed my mind. The practice, *shinrin-yoku* in Japanese, isn't about physical exercise. It's an effort to focus on your surroundings: the rustling trees and animal sounds, the smell of the forest air, the feel of the dirt under your feet.

The intentionality of the walk feels different from blasting through a trail with your headphones on. "I feel so grateful that my daily walks are through nature. It's such a joy to focus on the surroundings and enjoy the natural gifts of fresh air and calmness," said Rabih Maleh, who helps co-ordinate forest-bathing activities at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge in Alberta. "Taking a slow walk to really focus on the beauty around you, without distractions, helps you stay in the moment."

If you're not close to any forests yourself, you can apply the same principles to a nearby park or ravine. While the practice seems simple, it can take a bit of getting used to. Focusing on your breath and being aware of all your senses is a great place to start.

"Just try to put all the concentration on the sounds, your breathing, what you're seeing and smelling. We've found it can really reset what's going on," Maleh said.



CONSIDER A FOOT SOAK

A foot bath was one of the first things I tried when looking for a wind-down exercise. A timed soak of essential oils and Epsom salts meant that I wasn't able to move from my couch for 20 minutes. Placing my phone out of reach and settling in with a book, I was able to escape without distraction. I don't think this counts as meditation exactly, but it's the closest I've been able to get to it in months.

"You don't need alcohol to unwind – you just need intention," said Artanza Martínez, wellness co-ordinator at the Hotel Belmar in Costa Rica. "A botanical foot bath or herbal bath offers a range of mental and physical benefits."

According to Martínez, the right botanical combo – herbs such as lavender and rosemary – can have powerful benefits, including a "more grounded and centred state of mind."



TRY OUT SOME BREATHWORK

Am I really suggesting replacing a nightly cocktail with breathing exercises? I promise I'm not full of hot air. If the point of your evening cocktail is to calm your nerves and mark the transition from work into rest, intentional breathwork – varying your breathing in depth and tempo – may do both. Best of all, it's very easy and cost-effective.

"Breathwork is the conscious regulation of breath to influence the body's stress response. It helps calm the nervous system and improve focus," said Malati Mehrish, the head of yoga at Ananda in the Himalayas in India. "That can help to lower heart rate, reduce anxiety and release tension in the body."

If you're someone with a chaotic brain, implementing a nightly wind-down routine that takes too much time or effort can feel like another chore on your to-do list. With breathwork, something as simple as a 30-second exercise can help you reset. Box breathing is an easy way to start. "Inhale for four counts, hold for four, exhale for four and hold again for four," said Mehrish. "Repeating this for a few minutes can help you feel grounded and calm."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIGUEL MONKC

THE DRY BAR

Don't let the price tag stop you from these canned non-alcoholic drinks that are worth the cost, writes Sarah Kate

If you're being mindful about how much you're drinking this summer, one of the best ways to surf the urge for a cold bevvy is to find a non-alcoholic alternative. This category has grown rapidly over the years, and hundreds of options are available for every occasion or desire.

You might experience sticker shock at the high price of cocktails without booze in them – whether on a menu or shelf – but there is a good reason for that cost: Zero-proof drinks require innovation and more ingredients, according to Valérien Roy, co-founder at non-alcoholic spirits distiller HP Juniper.

"Crafting a high-quality spirit without alcohol as a flavour carrier means we must rely on a more complex blend of botanicals, aromatics and natural extracts to deliver the same depth, structure and satisfaction," Roy said.

If you're reaching for something at home, one of the easiest and cheapest ways to experiment is to go for a canned non-alcoholic drink. Here are some refreshing choices to try this summer that are worth the cost. Pro tip: Don't drink these straight from the can. Find some ice and a nice glass for a better experience.



IF YOU LIKE GIN AND TONIC:

The zero-proof gin and tonic is one summer drink you can count on to be a reasonable facsimile of the real thing. The catch is a lot of canned gin and tonic mocktails are available and not all of them are good. One of the best options you can find in Canada is a hidden gem. **NOROI Brise Glace Non-Alcoholic Gin and Tonic** is made in Quebec and has notes of bright citrus, juniper and a little bit of gentle heat emulating the real thing. Brise Glace Non-Alcoholic Gin and Tonic (Canada), \$12.99/four-pack at upsidedrinks.com.





IF YOU LIKE A MARGARITA:

There's something magical about margaritas, and drinking zero-proof doesn't mean you have to miss out on the salty smoky lime combo we all love. If you want to mix up a great mockarita, one of the very best non-alcoholic tequilas available is the made-in-Canada HP Agave. If you're more interested in opening something easy, the most exciting option is **Parch Drinks Co.** Parch has created a line of non-alcoholic margarita-style drinks using desert botanicals such as blue agave and packed full of lime and smoky heat. The Desert Margarita is a classic margarita flavour, while the Spiced Piñarita is like a juicy, fiery pineapple mezcalita. Parch Spiced Piñarita (U.S.), \$24/four-pack at sobrmarket.com.





IF YOU LIKE AN APEROL SPRITZ:

Nothing says summer like sitting on a bistro patio with an Aperol spritz. Fortunately, a lot of restaurants have opted into the mocktail trend with this iconic drink, creating bespoke in-house syrups and elixirs to dupe the bitter candied-orange aperitif flavour. For at home, my long-time favourite is from **ISH Spirits**, a Danish company that harnesses its non-alcoholic sparkling wine and a bitter aperitif together to create a bottled spritz. The resulting drink is not overly sweet, with fun bubbles and that classic Italian Riviera vibe. The bottle is 750 ml and serves four or five, so just open it, pour over ice and maybe add a slice of orange for some vitamin C. Cin cin! ISH Spritz (Denmark), \$19.95/bottle at clearsips.ca.





IF YOU LIKE SAUVIGNON BLANC:

Non-alcoholic wine options are getting better and better. If you don't want to risk trying a full bottle of non-alcoholic wine, a great way to dip your toe in is to try the 250 ml cans of **Cognato Chenin Blanc**.

Cognato is a non-alcoholic wine brand from South Africa and its wines are all made with grapes from low-yield vines in the coastal regions of South Africa.

Its Chenin Blanc is bright and fresh with a hint of minerality and tart acidity, and it doesn't taste like grape juice. Cognato Chenin Blanc (South Africa), \$8/can (two servings) at dryvariety.com.





IF YOU WANT SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT:

Try something fresh from **In Good Company**, a new female-founded Canadian drink line from the West Coast producing a line of functional mocktails with summer cocktail tastes. The Key Lime Mango Mojito is a flavour bomb you'll want to have on repeat, and the Watermelon Tajin Marg mocktail is like a Jolly Rancher in a can.

All four of their drinks are low-sugar, have prebiotic ACV in them and include a hit of low-dose caffeine to give you a boost. In Good Company (Canada), \$25/four-pack at drinkingoodcompany.com.

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