

## **1. How Alcohol Became My Only Way to Survive Anxiety – And How I Let It Go**

For years, alcohol felt like the only thing that could silence my mind. I didn't drink for fun, or for taste, or for social confidence. I drank because my anxiety was so loud that being sober felt unbearable.

My days were a loop of catastrophising, self-doubt, and relentless internal criticism. Nights were worse. I'd lie in bed and replay every conversation, convinced I'd said something wrong, missed something important, or exposed myself as a fraud. A few drinks turned down the volume. A few more turned it off completely.

At first, alcohol "worked." I could sleep. I could walk into meetings without my heart pounding out of my chest. I could get through social events without looking for the exit within five minutes. But slowly, the cost crept up. My tolerance went up, my shame went up, and my anxiety – the very thing I was trying to escape – came roaring back every morning, now with hangovers, memory gaps, and health scares attached.

The turning point wasn't dramatic. There was no rock-bottom arrest or firing. It was a quiet realisation one Sunday morning: I couldn't remember a single weekend in the last few years where I'd woken up clear-headed. I was building a life I couldn't fully inhabit.

Getting over it started with honesty.

- I stopped telling myself I was "blowing off steam." I called it what it was: self-medication with a drug that was slowly dismantling my body and mind.
- I told one person the truth – not the polished version, the real one. That broke the secrecy that was keeping the pattern alive.
- I sought proper mental health support: a doctor who took my anxiety seriously, and a therapist who understood both anxiety and addiction.

Stopping drinking wasn't a single decision; it was a daily practice. I had to relearn how to:

- Sit with anxiety without immediately numbing it.
- Leave events early without feeling guilty.
- Say "no" to rounds and not offer a 10-minute explanation.

The surprising part? When the alcohol left, the anxiety didn't disappear – but it finally became workable. Therapy started to land. Breathing exercises, mindfulness, sleep hygiene, and medication – all the things that never seemed to "work" when I was drinking suddenly had a chance.

Today, sobriety isn't about perfection. I still have anxious days. I still catch my brain scanning for danger in situations that are entirely safe. But I handle it with skills, not

substances. And I wake up remembering what I said, what I felt, and what I actually want from my life.

If you recognise yourself in this, you're not weak. You're someone who found a powerful, available coping strategy in a world that doesn't teach us how to manage our minds. But there are better tools. And some people know how to help you learn them. Alcohol might have felt like the only way to survive anxiety. It doesn't have to be the way you live.