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What we're drinking:

# How US consumers use beverages to unwind in 2025



## Introduction

When people want to relax, they reach for a drink. For some it's soda, for others it's a cold beer. Increasingly, it's whatever feels most rewarding in the moment: something that tastes good, fits the mood, and helps them demarcate the relaxing freedom of their evening or weekend hours from the tight chaos of the workday.

To understand what's driving these choices, we surveyed 502 U.S. adults. We wanted a clearer picture of how people are using beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic alike) to unwind.

Soda and coffee top the list for weekly consumption. Wine leads among alcoholic options for relaxation, followed by beer.

Taste is the #1 factor influencing beverage choice, cited as “very important” by more than half of respondents. And while many people are still drinking, a meaningful portion are drinking less, citing health, aging, and a shift toward mindfulness.

For beverage brands, this presents a strategic opportunity. People are looking for drinks that help them de-stress, celebrate small wins, or reclaim a moment of calm. The products that win will be those that show up in these moments with intention.

## What we'll cover

- **Position for context:** Home is the dominant relaxation setting. Social occasions still drive volume. Anchor your message in real-world scenarios.
- **Lead with taste:** Flavor is the biggest decision driver. Invest in sensory storytelling and product experiences that deliver on it.
- **Support the mindful consumer:** As more adults reduce or eliminate alcohol, low-ABV, alcohol-free, and functional options aren't fringe—they're foundational.

## Key findings

Get the highlights:



### Relaxation is social—and social drives choice.

80% of respondents opt for non-alcoholic beverages in social settings; 73.7% choose alcoholic ones. Context matters more than category.



### Beer is the top alcohol in social settings.

While soda stays strong, beer is the most frequently selected alcoholic beverage for social relaxation (22.8%).



### Wine leads for solo relaxation.

When asked to pick one alcoholic drink to relax with, 37.2% of respondents chose wine—beating beer by nearly 8 points.



### Most people haven't changed their habits—but the ones who have are moving mindfully.

240 respondents reported no change in their drinking. Of those who did, health and aging were the most common reasons to cut back; stress and socializing were the biggest drivers of increased alcohol use.

# U.S. adults are much more likely to relax with a soda vs. a beer

Our data shows that people reach for beverages in key contexts: social moments, weekends, TV time, and quiet evenings at home. And while both alcoholic and non-alcoholic options play a role, they're not interchangeable.

Alcohol tends to be chosen when people want to de-stress or feel rewarded. Non-alcoholic options show up more in social settings or as part of everyday routines.

Soda and coffee, for example, are mainstays. Nearly 83% of respondents say they drink tea or coffee several times a week.

Soda follows closely, with 73.1% reporting recent consumption and two-thirds drinking it multiple times weekly. These aren't just beverages—they're habits. Built into the background of daily life.

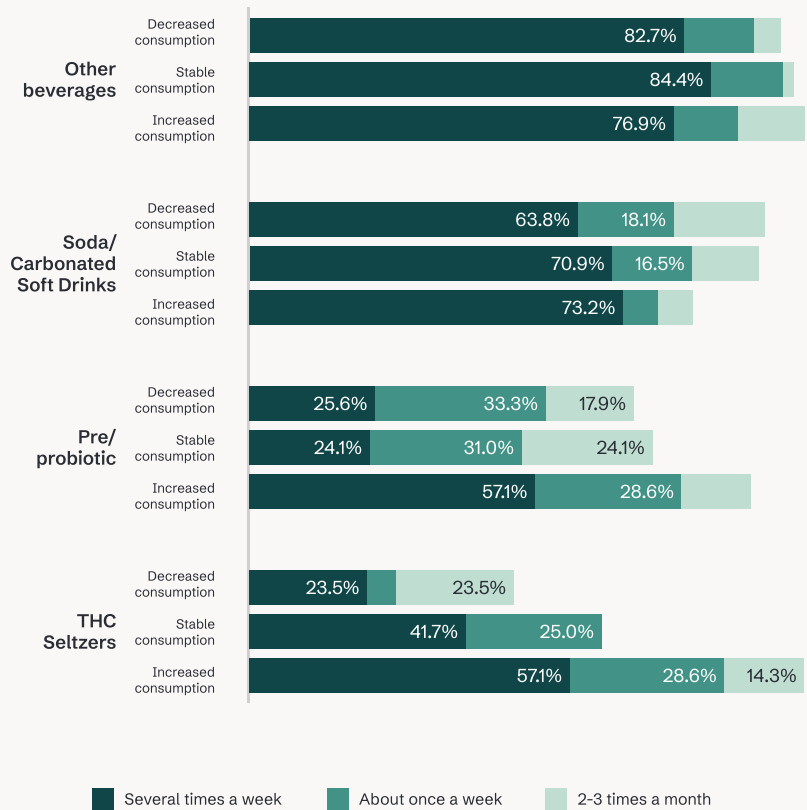
But when it comes to relaxation, context and motivation pull ahead of brand or category loyalty.

At home, soda wins. It's the top choice for 43.2% of respondents when relaxing in their own space, outpacing tea, coffee, and even alcohol.

In social settings, it still leads, but beer steps in as the most frequently chosen alcoholic option (22.8%).

A substantial portion of respondents consume alcoholic beverages several times a week, while other beverages - such as hot tea and coffee - lead in frequency, with 83.4% reporting regular consumption.

Consumption frequency - By change in alcohol consumption

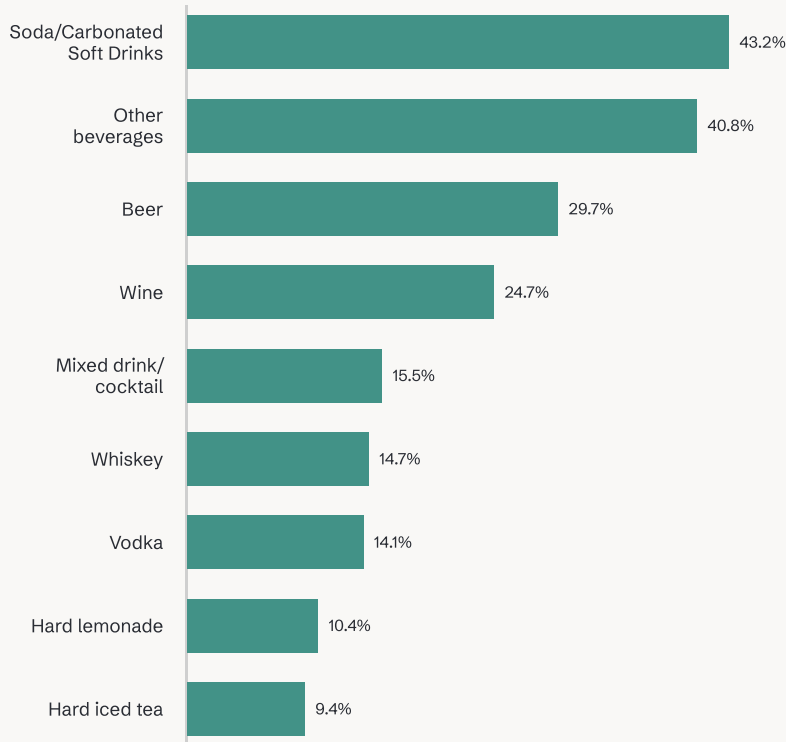




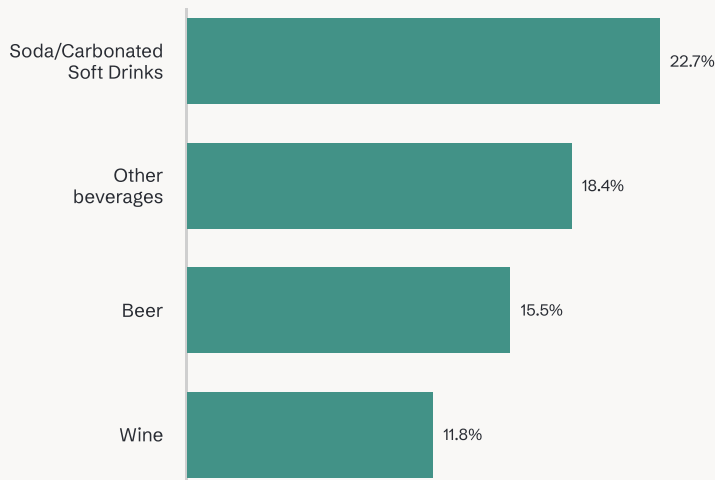
**Soda / carbonated soft drinks (43.2%) tops relaxation beverages at home, followed by other beverages (teas, coffee, juice) (40.8%).**

Non-alcoholic beverages are the top choice for at-home consumption, with alcoholic options like beer and wine following closely behind.

**At-home beverage preference**



**Most frequent At-home beverage**



That doesn't mean beer is the default. In fact, when people were asked to pick a single alcoholic drink for relaxation, wine took the top spot with 37.2% of the vote.

Gin and beer followed closely, with average preference rankings that suggest these three dominate the relaxation landscape.

Among beer drinkers specifically, domestic varieties were the clear favorite, chosen by nearly half (48.5%).

So what's behind these choices?

Taste. Simple as that. Flavor enjoyment was cited 182 times as the main reason for choosing one beverage over another when it's time to unwind.

And more than half of respondents (51.8%) rated taste as "very important" when choosing an alcoholic beverage to relax with. Not alcohol content. Not calories. Not even price. Just taste.

It's worth noting how evenly non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages split across emotional motivators — especially among those who are drinking less. 40% of respondents said they choose non-alcoholic drinks to de-stress, feel rewarded, enhance social experiences, or lift their mood.

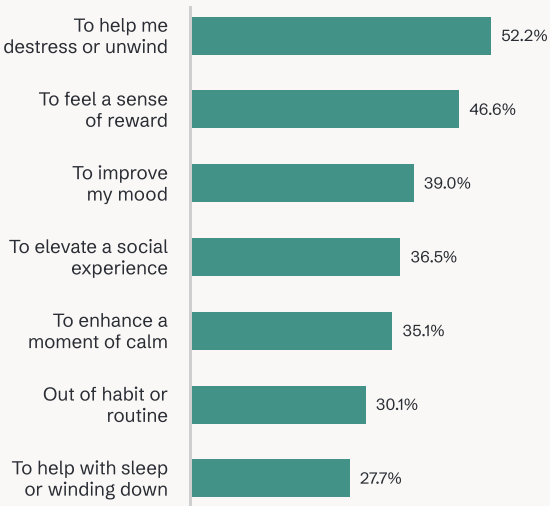
Those are nearly the same numbers as the alcohol group, minus the drawbacks.

The takeaway: consumers aren't just looking for a buzz. They're looking for a vibe. A drink that fits how they want to feel.

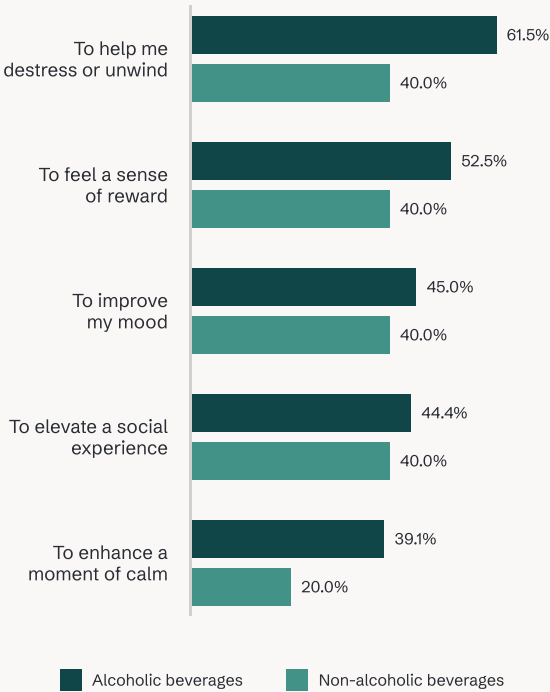
**Alcoholic beverages top nearly all consumer motivations - most notably preferred over non-alcoholic options for de-stressing (61.5% vs. 40%) and for experiencing a sense of reward (52.5% vs 40%).**

Non-alcoholic beverages are equally favored for de-stressing, feeling rewarded, enhancing social experiences, and improving mood - each cited by 40% of respondents.

Motivation behind beverage choice



Motivation behind beverage choice  
By beverage type

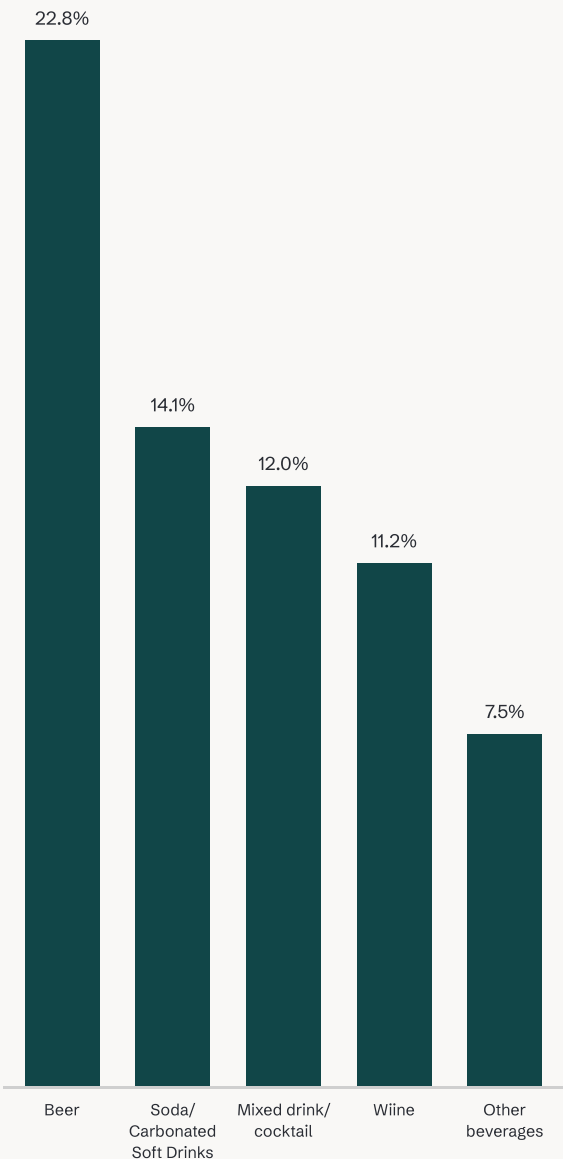


For brands, this opens up a lot of creative runway. If your beverage tastes great and makes people feel good, you're already halfway there.

But the positioning needs to meet the moment. Is this a drink for winding down on the couch? For bringing to a dinner party? For finding a little calm in a crowded day?

Taste may win the purchase—but context earns the spot in the routine.

Go-to beverage in social settings



# Alcohol is emotional, but it's no longer automatic

People don't drink just to drink. They drink to feel relief, connection, or a sense of calm.

And while alcohol still shows up in those moments, it's no longer the default — and it's definitely not the only option on the table.

When we asked respondents why they choose a beverage to relax with, one signal came through loud and clear: emotional benefit.

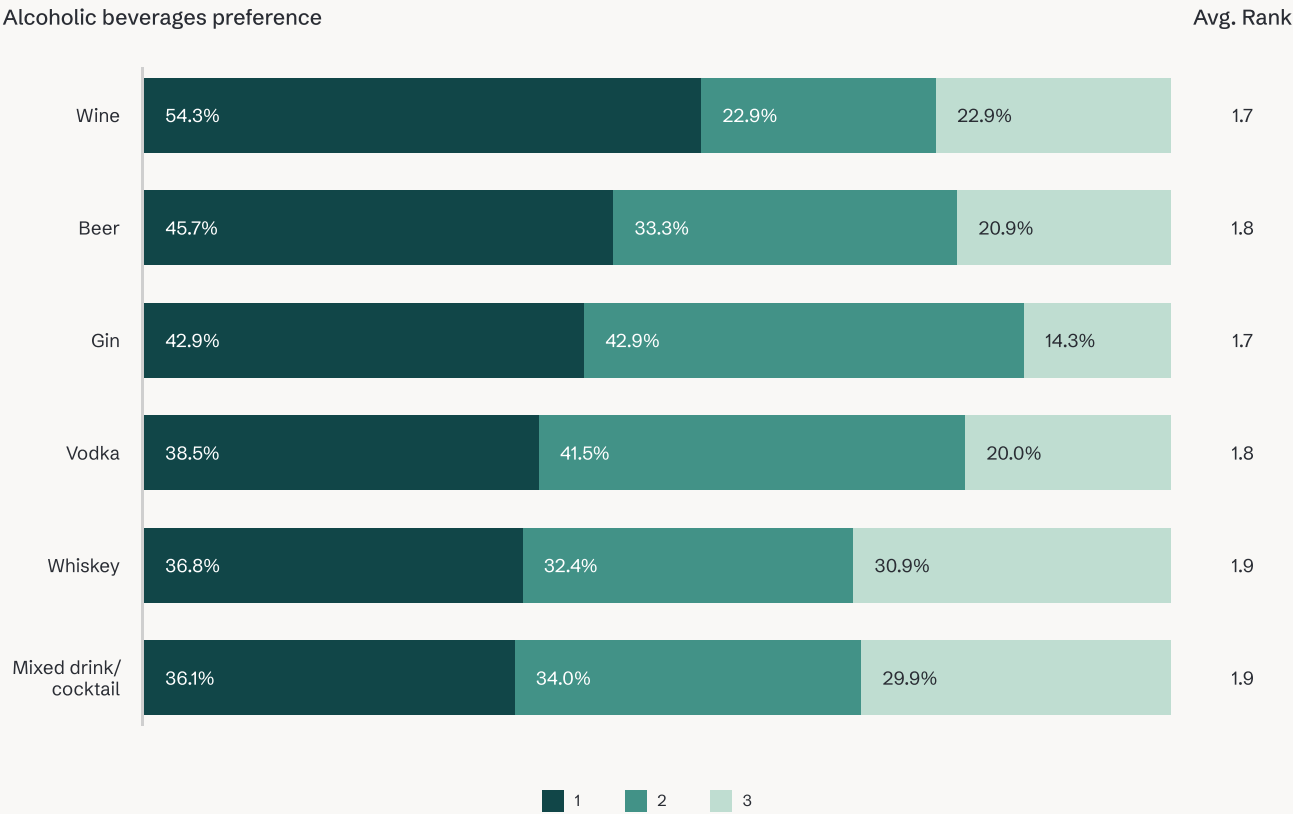
Alcoholic beverages outperformed non-alcoholic ones across the board when it came to stress relief (61.5% vs. 40%) and feelings of reward (52.5% vs. 40%).

In short, when people want to take the edge off or toast to something personal, alcohol still leads.

At home, soda is the most frequently chosen relaxation beverage. In social settings, beer leads the alcoholic category—but soda still comes out on top overall.

That says a lot about how consumers are managing their alcohol intake: not cutting it entirely, but choosing it more intentionally.

Wine and gin are the top-ranked beverages for relaxation, each averaging a rank of 1.7, closely followed by beer with an average rank of 1.8.



They tell us that people are making nuanced choices based on how they want to feel, not just what they've always reached for.

Beer might be the go-to in a group, but wine is what they choose when the vibe calls for something slower, softer. And when in doubt, soda covers both bases.

Another trend worth noting: beer drinkers are gravitating toward domestic brands. Among those who drink beer to relax, nearly half (48.5%) prefer regular or domestic styles.

Imported beers trailed at 27.8%, and ready-to-drink options like seltzers or canned cocktails, while growing, still lag behind.

Then there's the growing group of drinkers who prefer not to pick sides. 26.7% of respondents expressed equal preference across beer, wine, and ready-to-drink categories—suggesting that flexibility, rather than loyalty, is becoming the norm.

For beverage brands, that's both a challenge and an opportunity: consumers are open, but only if the offering fits the moment.

## Most people are drinking less in 2025 vs. 2024

People aren't quitting drinking, but they are reevaluating their relationship with alcohol.

When we asked people how their beverage habits had changed over the past year, nearly half said they hadn't changed at all. But among those who did report a shift, one pattern stood out: more people are drinking less.

Of the 502 respondents surveyed, 32.9% said they're drinking less alcohol now than they were a year ago.

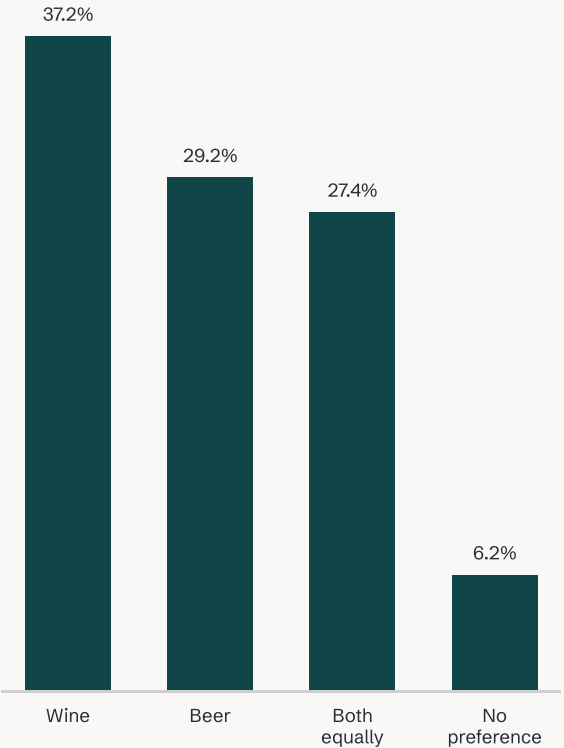
We probed further with the portion of respondents that reported drinking less alcohol with qualitative video research to find out why they were drinking less.

Their reasons were consistent and telling: health concerns, aging, and a broader desire to feel more in control of their routines. Some pointed to medical advice. Others described a natural evolution in how they think about leisure and self-care.

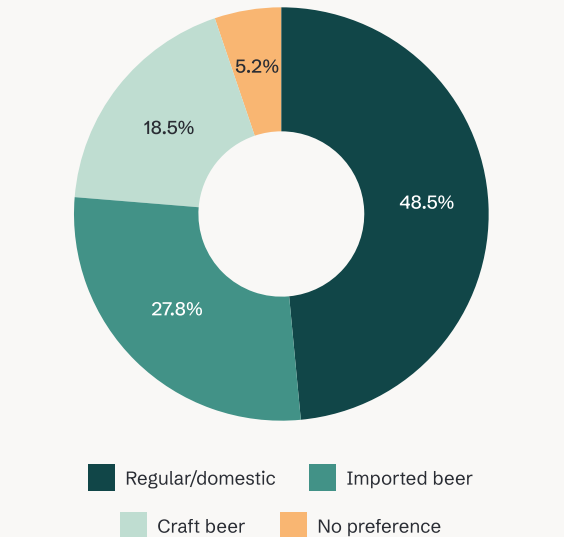
### Wine leads as the preferred beverage for relaxation, selected by 37.2% of respondents, with beer following at 29.2%

Among beer options, regular/domestic varieties are the most preferred, receiving 48.5% of votes, while imported beers are cited less frequently at 27.8%.

Wine vs. beer preference



Type of beer preference





## Voice of the Consumer at scale

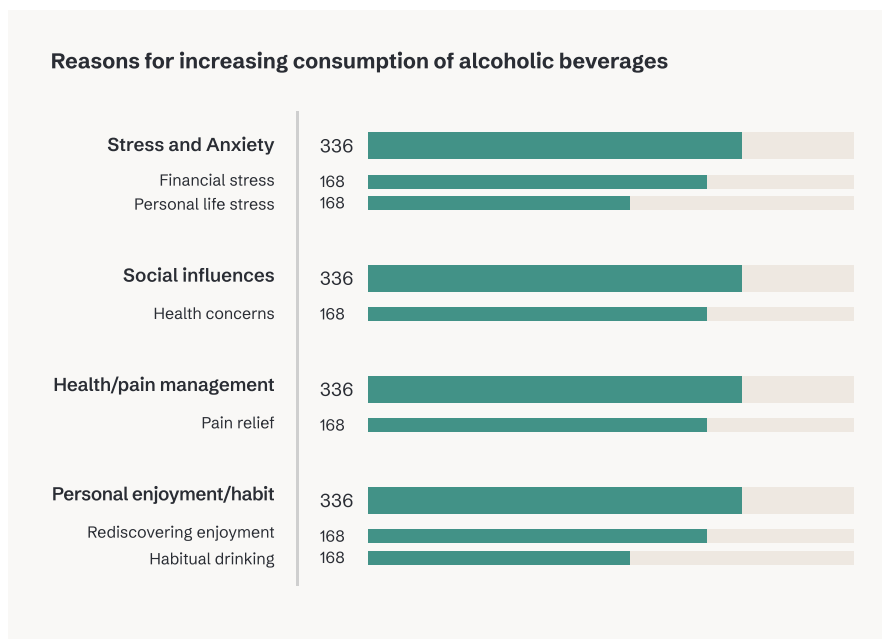
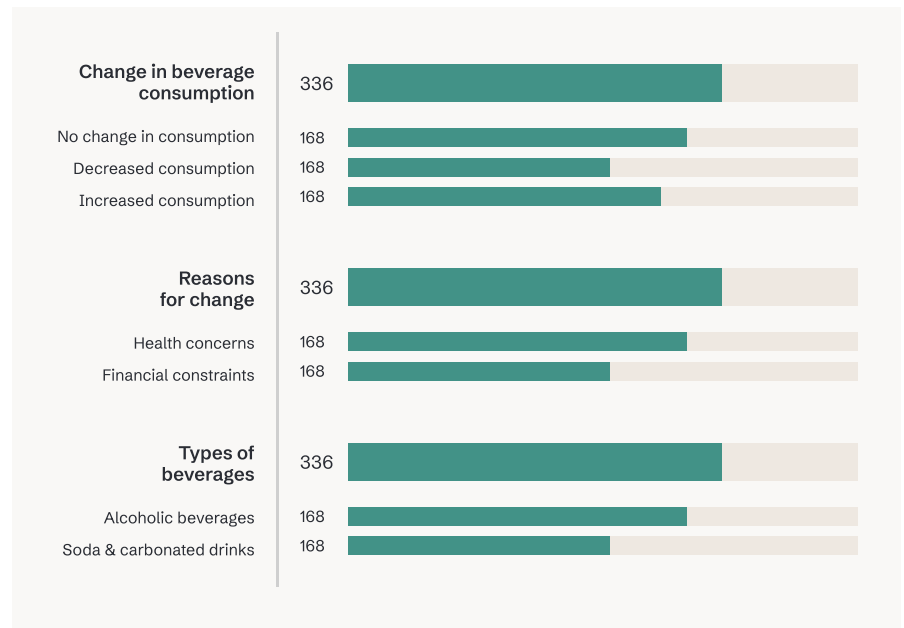
With Knit, research teams can gather and analyze hundreds of video responses to qualitative research questions. After aggregating responses, Knit identifies and groups themes in video feedback using AI Contextual Analysis, weaving together significant, subtle, and surprising findings into video showreels you can integrate into your final report immediately.

That's not to say everyone is cutting back.

Some reported drinking more — largely due to financial stress, socializing, or the simple desire to enjoy themselves more in tough times.

But this group was smaller, and their motivations more situational than systemic.

What's emerging here is a new relationship with alcohol: one where moderation, flexibility, and purpose are guiding principles.



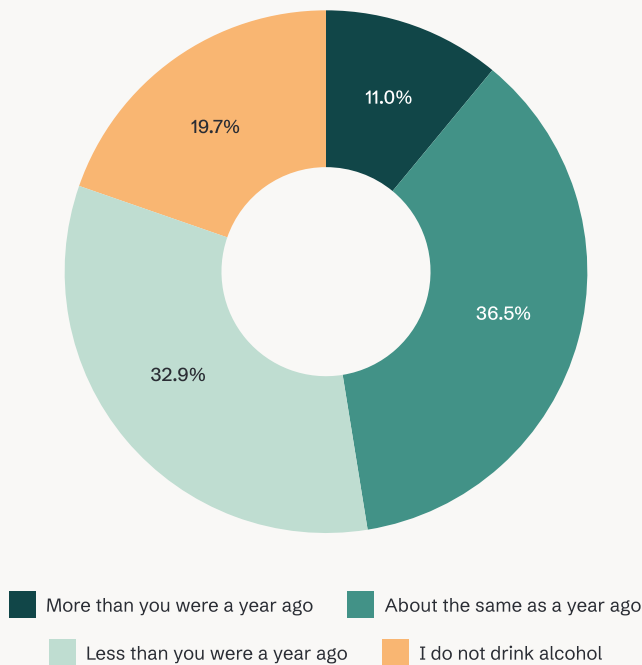
This shift is clearest among those who are actively substituting other beverages in place of alcohol. Among the respondents who said they're drinking less, 264 identified the drinks they're reaching for instead.

Tea and juice topped the list. Mocktails? Not so much.

The gap points to a branding problem, not a demand issue. Consumers are clearly interested in alternatives—but those alternatives need to feel like real options, not afterthoughts.



**Stable alcohol consumption dominates amidst shifts in drinking habits. 32.9% of respondents report that they are consuming less than they did a year ago.**



That's a key lesson for brands: alcohol alternatives don't need to mimic the alcohol experience. They need to meet the same emotional and sensory expectations.

People are looking for something that feels satisfying, tastes great, and fits into the same rituals—whether that's a quiet night in or a celebratory toast.

Another signal: consumers who are drinking less aren't necessarily rejecting alcohol altogether.

They're reserving it for specific moments, with more thought behind when and why they drink. That means traditional cues like "happy hour" or "party starter" aren't always enough.

The emotional narrative matters more. Is this a drink for a personal reward? A health-conscious social swap? A refined indulgence without the aftermath?

If you're a brand operating in this space, here's what this adds up to:

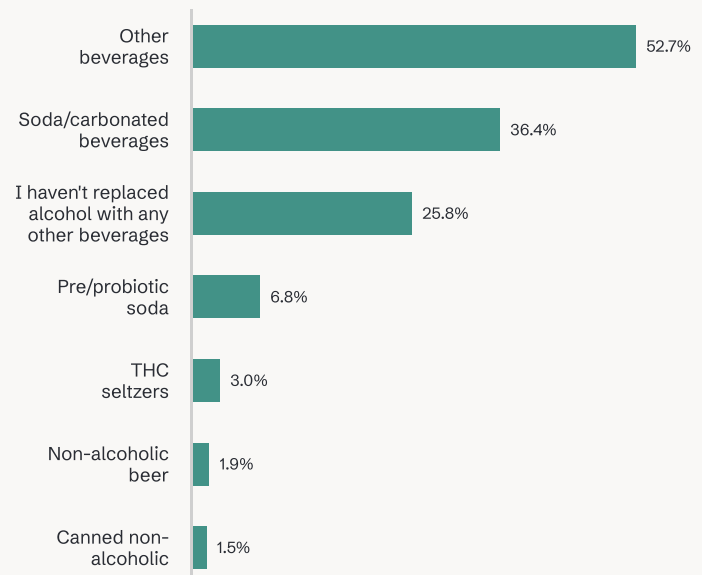
**Mindful drinking isn't a subculture — it's the new baseline.**

Consumers are managing their intake, substituting more freely, and prioritizing products that deliver on feeling and flavor.

This doesn't mean alcohol brands are on their way out. But it does mean the messaging, product lines, and positioning all need to evolve.

To stay relevant, brands need to make space for both: the full-strength classic and the thoughtful alternative. Because for today's consumers, drinking less doesn't mean enjoying less. It just means drinking with purpose.

**Teas and juices lead alcohol substitutes while mocktails lag behind.**



## What people are saying

### On why those that are drinking less are reducing alcohol intake

*"I've started drinking less because I'm getting older and I don't go out as much. Also, I have a daughter."*

- middle-aged black woman

*"I have decreased my alcohol use within the last year or so simply because I'm getting older. So I have not been able to drink the same amount that I used to five years ago without feeling really hungover the next day."*

- middle-aged white woman

*"I'm drinking a lot less right now because it's not healthy for you, and inflation is so high right now."*

- white woman, young adult

*"I stopped drinking alcoholic beverages about 10 years ago when I moved from Texas to New York. I was probably drinking more than I should. It was also very expensive."*

- elderly white man

### On their ideal drink and scenario for relaxation

*"After getting off work, I'll have a craft beer,"*

- black male, young adult

*"Usually I'll be at home, watching a movie. The more stress at work, the higher the alcohol content."*

- white male, young adult

*"Sitting outside my house on my porch swing, listening to the birds and nature, drinking some sweet tea or peppermint tea."*

- middle-aged white woman

*"When I'm sitting at home and having a drink to relax, I typically will do a margarita or a mule."*

- black male, young adult

*"In order to relax, what you need is a bottle of whiskey and a slot machine."*

- white male, young adult

## Conclusion: Sell relaxation, not ABV

What people drink to relax is changing. Across the 502 adults we surveyed, beverage choice emerged less as a reflection of category loyalty and more as an expression of intent.

Consumers are drinking because they want to feel something: calm, connected, rewarded, at ease.

Wine, beer, and gin still anchor many moments of relaxation, especially when stress relief or emotional payoff is the goal.

But increasingly, so do soda, tea, and functional alternatives that offer flavor without trade-offs.

The throughline undergirding this shift is that taste and emotion carry more weight than tradition or ABV.

People are building rituals around how they want to feel. Home is the center of that universe. Social settings are still powerful, but they're no longer the only trigger.

In both, consumers are selecting drinks with more care, substituting when it feels right, and backing away when the moment calls for something else.

For beverage brands, this shift creates a compelling opportunity. Not to pivot away from what's worked, but to rethink how products are framed, where they show up, and what stories they tell. The brands that will win are those that:

- **Design for intentional use**—anchoring in real-life moments of rest, reward, and restoration
- **Deliver on flavor first**—with products that don't require compromise to feel satisfying
- **Speak to a mindful mindset**—one where balance, not abstinence, drives behavior

Relaxation isn't a secondary benefit. It's a core use case. And increasingly, it's one consumers are building their beverage choices around.

The brands that take this seriously will be the ones that feel right at the right moment.



## Methodology

This study was conducted in May 2025 to better understand how U.S. adults use beverages—both alcoholic and non-alcoholic—as part of their relaxation routines.

A total of **502 respondents** participated in a structured, online survey. Participants were screened to ensure demographic diversity across age, gender, region, and drinking behavior. The survey included both **quantitative questions** (e.g., consumption frequency, beverage rankings, preference selections) and **qualitative prompts** (e.g., open-ended responses on motivations, personal routines, and emotional context).

### Key areas of focus included:

- Frequency of beverage consumption across categories
- Motivations for choosing specific beverages to relax
- Preferred settings and occasions for drinking
- Emotional associations with alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages
- Changes in consumption habits over the past year
- Substitution patterns among those reducing alcohol intake

The sample was representative of general population beverage consumers and included a mix of regular drinkers, occasional drinkers, and those actively reducing or eliminating alcohol. Separate analyses were conducted on subgroups where applicable (e.g., current alcohol consumers vs. non-drinkers, younger adults vs. older respondents).

The data was cleaned and analyzed using standard statistical and thematic analysis techniques, with particular attention paid to recurring behaviors, shifts in sentiment, and actionable differences across contexts.

This research was designed not only to quantify consumer preferences, but to explore the underlying why behind those choices — giving beverage brands a deeper understanding of the emotional and behavioral dimensions of modern relaxation.

## Contributors



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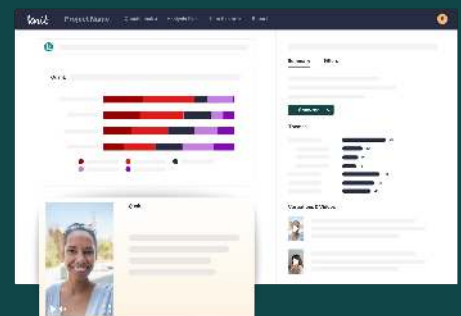
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## About Knit

Knit is the end-to-end consumer research platform top brands use to get deep quant and qual insights at scale in a single survey. The Knit AI-native platform automates key phases of the research process from scoping to storytelling, so you can do more research in less time and at a fraction of the cost.



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