

(TC: 00:00:00)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Hello and welcome back to another episode of The Food Medic podcast. I'm your host as always, Dr Hazel. So, today, we are talking about sobriety. I guess if you guys follow me on social media, you may have heard me or seen me talk about this because I've been dabbling with going alcohol-free over the last 12 months really. I'm definitely not at a point where I am sober and I do still consume alcohol. But I've tried periods of going completely sober and that was really because I felt like alcohol was contributing to my anxiety. I was having palpitations afterwards and it was disrupting my sleep. And, actually, the periods that I stopped drinking were largely during lockdowns. So, in this episode, I say it was easy, but it was largely easy for that reason in that I didn't have the, I guess, peer pressure of drinking alcohol. Not to say that my friends put me under a huge amount of pressure, but society does, let's be honest. And, so, yes, I think my longest period was four months and I felt great afterwards. But I do really enjoy a glass of wine or a cocktail and I'm going going to deny that. I also don't want to make any absolutes when it comes to saying I am this or that, and I'm the same when it comes to my diet. So, basically, as I've been talking about it more, you guys have been asking questions and wanted to hear more because you're curious and I love that. So, I've invited Millie Gooch on the podcast today.

Now, Millie is the founder of the Sober Girl Society and is one of the voices leading the sobriety movement in the UK. So, she's a journalist and has written for a range of publications and has done a lot of campaigning which has featured everywhere from Elle and Stylist to the BBC and the Evening Standard, and she's published her first book, which is The Sober Girl Society, but, even if you're a guy listening, this conversation is for everyone. Also, if you're not interested in cutting alcohol completely, again, this conversation is for everyone. It's for people who are just wanting to learn a bit more about going alcohol-free or considering cutting down on alcohol. And wherever you are on your journey, I really recommend you sticking around and having a listen because I really, really enjoyed this episode.

[AD break]

Dr Hazel Wallace: It's so good to have you on.

(TC: 00:04:22)

Millie Gooch: Oh, thank you for having me. I've been looking forward to it.

(TC: 00:04:25)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Basically what I'd love to start with is to find out a bit more about you and your background and, I guess, what inspired you to start the Sober Girl Society.

(TC: 00:04:33)

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

Millie Gooch: Yes, of course. So, my background is actually journalism. And, basically, I kind of came to Sober Girl Society because I started drinking when I went to university. So, actually, kind of before uni a lot of my friends were doing the, you know, being fourteen, drinking White Lightning cider and I actually managed to skip all of that really. So, I actually kind of came to alcohol at university. And I think when I look back on it now it wasn't even a question of, oh, will I drink at university? It was kind of a non-negotiable. It was, yes, that's what you do. So, I kind of went head first into university culture. I, you know, got a job in a shop bar. I got a job in a Vodka Revolutions. I went kind of full throttle, and went from kind of a zero drinker to a three-, four-night a week binge drinker. I never played with that middle ground of, you know, a couple of drinks here and there. It was always very full-on drinking.

And I kind of, after I left uni, took those habits with me. So, I went to work in PR and then journalism, and the media industry is quite a heavy-drinking industry. So, I didn't really slow down. And alcohol really started as something that I did just because everyone else did it. It was kind of expected at uni. And then, gradually, it became something that I felt more like I needed and in terms of, like, oh, I need it for confidence and I need it if I'm going on a date and I need it if I'm going on a night out. And it had never really been something that I needed until I started drinking it, which is the irony of it. And, gradually, my drinking just sort of got a bit worse. And, you know, I would go out on a Tuesday night for drinks and fall asleep on the train and ended up miles from my house. I was kind of, like, saying things that I didn't remember and doing things that I didn't remember. And it just slightly got a bit more dangerous. I'd wake up and not really remember how I got home. I was really suffering from blackouts. And kind of towards my mid-twenties it really started to take a toll on my mental health. So, I was always anxious, especially on a hangover with hangover anxiety or 'hangxiety' as we like to call it. And then I kind of noticed that just taking a bit more of a toll generally on my mental health. So, you know, at the weekends, I would spend them always pretty hungover, never really actually resting, going straight to work on Monday, doing a full week at work, and then just going out and partying. I was a weekend warrior I would say.

And, because of that, I never really, like, would get outside on a hangover. I was, you know, eating Domino's Pizza for breakfast, and, you know, I was financially not very well because I spending all my money on Jägerbombs and tequila. And I just woke up in February 2018, I had this, like, almighty hangover and just said I don't want to keep doing this, I don't think I can keep doing this anymore. It's exhausting, like, mentally I'm on the floor. And I kind of looked around on Instagram because I thought, you know, it would be really nice to find other people who feel like this, who don't necessarily identify with kind of an AA recovery path, but still feel like alcohol is quite damaging to them. So, I couldn't find anything. I could find, you know, like a few groups that were talking about mummy wine culture, but I wasn't a mum so I didn't identify, and there was kind of very recovery-heavy groups that were kind of based in the US, and I thought, well, you know, maybe I could start something, I know how to use Instagram. And I thought maybe ten of us would gather and talk about non-alcoholic wine and it just escalated and kind of snowballed. And, yes, so, Sober Girl Society is now the largest community of women on Instagram who are sober or sober-curious. So, it's a bit of a convoluted long story, but that's how I get there in the end.

(TC: 00:08:14)

Dr Hazel Wallace: I love that. And I guess this is probably a really obvious question, but what do you mean when you say 'sober-curious'?

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

(TC: 00:08:21)

Millie Gooch: Yes, so, interestingly, this has got a bit confused over the last few years. So, sober-curious, some people think it means curious about becoming full-time sober. But, actually, there's kind of this new definition, which was brought in by Ruby Warrington who wrote the book 'Sober Curious', and that is that sober curiosity is like a permanent state. So, you never kind of declare yourself teetotal, but you are just-, it's quite interchangeable with the term 'mindful drinker'. So, it means, like, you're really aware of your drinking habits, you probably don't binge drink, your default will be tending to not drink a lot, you might have a drink on special occasions. It's more that you're really kind of conscious. You know, when I was drinking, I was such a mindless drinker of just knocking back anything. It was like, 'Oh, does this have alcohol in it? Cool, I'll drink it'. So, it's just being really aware of, you know, the motivations behind your drinking. Am I drinking because I'm stressed? Or am I drinking because, you know, it's a party and I'm in a really good mood? So, it's just an awareness, really, about your drinking.

(TC: 00:09:21)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Oh, I'm so glad I asked you that because I had no idea. But I love that. I just think, yes, it's wonderful. So, basically, the reason that, like, I wanted to speak to you about this is I think it's something that everyone's a little bit more interested about especially after the year that we've had in, like, going into various lockdowns and also just dealing with kind of collective trauma and stress. And, so, I feel like people either were one way or the other. They were, like, drinking all the time or they actually weren't drinking at all because they were going out. And, for me, personally, in the first lockdown, I felt like (TC 00:10:00) it was almost like a novelty. It was summer, I was drinking a lot of rose after work, and I found myself getting into this habit where I was drinking it but it was more as a stress relief. It wasn't that I was, like, particularly enjoying it or wanting it. I just kind of was doing it out of habit. And I was kind of, for background, working on a COVID ward, so it was a really, like, stressful time, but then I was coming home and, like, also stressing my body with alcohol.

And I'm really glad that you mentioned the kind of fact that it's not-, you know, there's a spectrum of how much you drink and your relationship with alcohol, so I definitely wasn't dependent on it, like I didn't need to have it in the mornings. And, so, after that, I was like, do you know what, I'm ready to kind of stop drinking for a bit. And, so, I just dabbled with kind of periods of non-drinking and my longest was, I think, 120 days, which is just-,

(TC: 00:10:54)

Millie Gooch: Nice.

(TC: 00:10:54)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes.

(TC: 00:10:55)

Millie Gooch: Well done.

(TC: 00:10:56)

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

Dr Hazel Wallace: I know. And I found it really easy, to be honest. I didn't miss alcohol. I think what made it easy for me is that I was like, wow, I didn't realise how good my body could feel not drinking alcohol and, like, how good my sleep was, my energy levels, just, like, overall feeling better in myself. I don't feel like I'm ready to give myself that label of being sober because since easing lockdown I have had alcohol drinks. And, so, basically, I found I'm kind of in this position where I'm like I'm not really sure, you know, what I'm doing, whether to label it, and also I think, from speaking to other friends who are in the same position, it's like why is it so hard to break up with alcohol? And I guess that's the question I want to ask you because I think we all know that, like, we're not going to feel good afterwards and, yet, we still go back to it. And, like, the analogy I used with someone was it's like that ex-boyfriend that, like, you know that they're not good for you, but you still go back to them because, in the moment the comfort, is nice.

(TC: 00:12:01)

Millie Gooch: Oh, my god. I use the ex-boyfriend analogy for alcohol all the time.

(TC: 00:12:06)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Do you?

(TC: 00:12:07)

Millie Gooch: Honestly, you find so many parallels with it. It's even like when we talk about, you know, look, once you're like a year down the line you forget how bad they were for you, so you romanticise them. Like, we compare it to an ex-boyfriend all the time. So, you're quite right in that analogy.

(TC: 00:12:51)

Millie Gooch: But I just think it's so hard because it's everywhere. And it's, you know, celebration, it's commiseration. And that, to me, now that I look back on it, I think is a weird concept. I'm like why do we use the same thing that we use to celebrate a friend's promotion that we use when someone has died. Like, it is a really kind of weird contrast that we do that. And, also, alcohol is just everywhere. Like, if you look at photos, we're all holding it. Like, it is just an accessory now that it's everywhere. And, unfortunately, as well, we've kind of become our own marketers of it as well. Like, none of us need to be paid on Instagram to be holding our wine glass. The alcohol industry have it great because they just have so many people giving, like, free advertising to them. So, it is hard because it is absolutely everywhere and it's such a social expectation, and, you know, we use it for bonding, we use it when we're going on dates, it's how we meet new people. It is just impossible to kind of get away from it really.

(TC: 00:13:51)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes, that's so true. It really is. It's like every experience involves alcohol in some shape or form.

(TC: 00:13:58)

Millie Gooch: Yes.

(TC: 00:13:59)

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

Dr Hazel Wallace: And I think, like, a lot of people, I mean, everyone is basically aware that it's not good for you. In the long term, there are health implications of drinking alcohol and that, like, spans things like heart disease to various forms of cancer. But what we don't really talk about is like the other symptoms. And these are the things that, personally, make me really not want to drink alcohol, and that's like hangxiety, the palpitations I get after I drink, the fear I experience and also the sleep disturbance. I'd love to chat a little bit about them.

(TC: 00:14:33)

Millie Gooch: Yes, of course. I mean, I was exactly the same. I knew that alcohol wasn't kale. I knew that it caused cancer. I think probably I didn't realise to what extent it was linked, but you do know that, you know, you're not drinking elderberry juice or something. You do know it's bad for you. So, for me, the kicker was the mental side of it. And that's not really, like, discussed. When we kind of hear warnings about alcohol, it's really concentrating on, like, the physical effects, but not many people kind of talk about the mental effects. And I just didn't realise at the time how linked it was to my anxiety and how linked it was to depression and so many, kind of, other mental health conditions that it can exacerbate. And the problem is it's such an intertwined phenomenon as well. It's a bit like chicken and egg because you can't really decipher which comes first. So, if you've got anxiety and you're drinking a lot, you know, a lot of us drink to calm anxiety, but it often exacerbates anxiety, so then you drink more to calm it and you quickly get into this real cycle, which is what I think I was in. You know, I was constantly drinking because I wasn't feeling confident and I was feeling anxious, and then I would drink and I would feel fine in that moment, and then the next day I would feel even worse and it just got into that kind of spiral. So, those were the things for me, and also particularly blackouts. I experienced those quite a lot, and I know speaking to a lot of other people now that they have. And, you know, that not remembering things, that caused me anxiety in itself as well as the chemical effects of alcohol. And there is so much to it and I kind of didn't realise how much it was a problem in my life until I took it out.

(TC: 00:16:05)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes, that's so true. I think if it's something that you're doing really regularly, it's very hard to separate it from other things in your life that may be causing those feelings and feelings of anxiety. And, I mean, I don't want to make this podcast all about shaming people who drink, and also I fit into that bracket because I still drink alcohol, but I just want to kind of highlight, just like you said, the fact that there are these kind of mental implications that the light really isn't shone on when it comes to talking about health effects of alcohol.

(TC: 00:16:38)

Millie Gooch: Yes. And I always say, look, I don't judge anyone who does drink. You know, my family drinks, all my friends drink, my partner drinks. So, it's not about that. But there's so many things that you can do to kind of reduce your harms of alcohol, even if it's that not giving it up entirely. You know, even things like dry months, like Dry January, Sober October, they just give you that breathing space to kind of analyse, actually, could this be having an affect on my anxiety? If you take 30 days off and then kind of think, actually, my mood is a lot better, then you kind of have that understanding and that knowledge. Whereas if we don't ever pause, you never really stop to sit back and analyse, actually, what role is alcohol playing in my life and what role is it having on my physical mental health?

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

(TC: 00:17:17)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Absolutely. And I think looking at the positives, what are some of the benefits of going alcohol-free that you've experienced?

(TC: 00:17:25)

Millie Gooch: It sounds so cliché and I always think people will probably think I've, like, joined a cult, but there isn't one thing, honestly, that hasn't been, like, positively impacted even if it's like a little bit from giving up alcohol. Whether that is, like, physical health, mental health, more time, more energy, more money, better sleep, like everything. My relationships are better. I like who I am, which sounds really silly. But it's really helped me, like, get to know myself without this kind of, like, blanket of alcohol. And it's just given me more confidence because, you know, I don't rely on alcohol as much. That used to be 'Oh, I couldn't do this without alcohol' and 'I couldn't do that'. And over the three years that I haven't drank, I've proved to myself that I can do those things and it has given me more confidence. And I'm not saying there are no downsides to it. But pretty much everything in my life is better for not drinking.

(TC: 00:18:16)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. No, that's really good to hear. And I've kind of experienced some of this, but I'm sure you'll be able to talk about it a bit more, kind of dealing with the stigma that you come up against with friends, family, colleagues when you say that you're not drinking and how to navigate that because it can be very easy to like, I don't know, turn into a chameleon and change your mind to decide, okay, I'm just going to drink because it'll make everyone else feel more comfortable and happier with the evening.

(TC: 00:18:42)

Millie Gooch: Yes. There's two things I think you commonly come up against. One is you're boring and the other one I think is because of the stigma associated with drinking or having a drinking problem is normally you have this, you know, stereotypical alcohol dependency, a lot of the time people will say, 'Oh, you're not that bad, you're fun, you can drink', like, you know, 'Oh, you're not dependent on it'. So, those are the two things that I kind of really came up against at the start. And, I mean, the second one, I kind of really had very honest conversations with my friends. You know, first of all, they joked about it, and I said, 'Well, actually, it is really making me miserable'. And I said, like, 'I don't know if it's going to be a forever thing, but, like, at the moment it's a thing and I would really, really appreciate you, like, getting on board and supporting me'. And I think as soon as I had those, like, really honest conversations with people, they were so much more understanding than if I'd been like, 'Oh, I'm just flippantly not drinking at the moment' or, like, 'I'm on antibiotics'. I think people find that they can push you if you don't give them the whole story. And I know that's kind of easier said than done, especially if you're at the start, you don't necessarily want to go into the full detail of it. But I just find being as honest as possible with your relationship with alcohol and how it is affecting you helps people understand it a bit more.

And then (TC 00:20:00) I think with the kind of, like, 'boring' thing, that is one of the biggest things I hear from people. Like, I say, 'Look, what would stop you going full-time sober from sober-curious?' And they

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

say, 'Look, other people and the peer pressure and them thinking that I won't be fun'. So, that one is really hard. But I would just say it's kind of like a time thing. Like, the longer you do it, the more your friends will notice that actually, like, you can still be fun and you can still do those things. I think my friends called me 'boring' for about the first three or four months. And then when I said, 'Look, but am I actually any less fun? Am I not coming out? Am I still not doing all the stuff?' And they were like, 'Oh, you know, actually, you are still really fun'. So, I think a lot of it is just time and people getting used to it. And, you know, I always say, unfortunately, a lot of the time, people's reactions are actually a reflection of their relationship with alcohol. And I know from myself if three years ago someone said to me, 'Oh, you know, I'm not going to drink tonight', I would think that was the worst thing in the world because then I thought, god, well, they're going to notice how drunk I'm getting and I want everyone else to be on my level.

So, I think you just have to try and be really confident in your decision. Remember why you're doing it. Remember that it's kind of for you and no one else. And also really learn about setting those kind of hard boundaries of, 'No, I'm not drinking tonight'.

(TC: 00:21:13)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. I've been discussing this, like, quite regularly on Instagram and there's, like, so many people who are really interested in it. And a lot of women have, like, spoken to me who are single and they're like, 'I've just started dating and I find that really difficult to do sober. Like, I feel like I don't want to be on a first date and say I'm not drinking, or I feel like I need the drink to help me relax'. Well, not just women. Women and men. And even, like, the whole concept of having sober sex seems to be this really scary thing for people.

(TC: 00:21:45)

Millie Gooch: Yes. It's a major factor. So many people kind of talk about that when they come up against, you know, what's going to be the hard things about not drinking. Again, like, it's a really hard thing because I always want to give people, like, 'Oh, here's my ultimate tips', and I do have some, like, really easy things that you can do for dating. But, generally, it's kind of like practice makes-, you know, I never say perfect, but progression. And it's kind of like you have to just go on these dates. The first one and the first thing you do sober of anything, whether that's, you know, a wedding, a date, a bottomless brunch, is never going to be, like, super easy. It's always going to be a little bit awkward because you're doing something new that you've never done before. But once you've done that first one, you're kind of like, 'Oh, well, that actually wasn't that scary'. And then you kind of do the next one and you do the next one. And then by the time you get to about date four or five, you're like, 'Well, this is great'. It's just often getting past that, like, first hurdle.

But there's so many things that you can do to kind of make it easier. I always told people up front that I didn't drink because I didn't want to wait until the date and see their reaction just in case they reacted negatively. I thought, well, at least if I tell them up front and they're not okay about it then I don't have to go on the date with them. And then even things like, you know, when I was drinking, I was never prepared for dates. So, I wouldn't get my outfit ready, I would get dressed, like, last minute, fluster, get really stressed, and then have a glass of wine. I wouldn't look to see where I was going on Google Maps so I would get lost and then I'd turn up late and then I'd feel stressed and then I'd have another glass of wine. You know, like, getting things prepared, knowing where you're going, kind of getting your outfit ready, putting on the good,

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

sassy music playlist. Like, all those kind of things that you can do to get yourself in the right headspace because I always think if you're in the best possible headspace then that's when you're least likely to drink. So, if you can just try and keep that in mind when you're, like, getting ready for a date.

But I found sober dating, at first, terrifying, but generally one of the best things that I ever did. And I've done a lot of drunk dating in my time. I always say gin can create a spark from nothing. It's kind of like you don't really listen to each other because you're just kind of drinking. And I've left many a drunk date and gone, you know, 'they're the one'. And then met up with them sober, being like, 'Well, actually, we don't have a lot in common'. Whereas going on a first date sober, it sounds really kind of cliché, but you can feel whether you have that chemistry without alcohol, and that's quite nice. I was also meeting people who kind of had similar lifestyles that weren't necessarily non-drinkers, but were more interested in doing things outside of drinking. So, it was really nice to meet people like that. Whereas I think before I'd just always gone, 'Oh, well they're a drinker, I'll go on a date with them'. So, I found it was a really good experience. And I'm not saying you don't get the odd person who doesn't understand it, but, you know, why would you want to be with that person anyway.

(TC: 00:24:39)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. No, that's so true.

(TC: 00:25:11)

Dr Hazel Wallace: And it's safer, isn't it? Like, when you think about it. Because, like you said just now, if you're avoiding drink, you tend to drink when you're not in a mentally stable place or a safe space. And, so, if you're nervous and using alcohol as a crutch for that anxiety, then you end up drinking loads. You go on a date. You don't know whether you really like them. And then you may just decide to kind of go with the flow, like, you know, you're not letting people know where you are, you might stay out later, things may happen that you don't want to happen. And I just think having an awareness, you know, especially thinking about where we're living in London, it's so important, and that goes for both men and women, and you can be more clear about what you want and whether this is a person that you want to go home with.

(TC: 00:26:03)

Millie Gooch: Yes, 100%. And, I mean, even the kind of vulnerability aspect of, you know, I was commuting home and, you know, my mum was forever scared that I was just going to, like, fall on a train track because there are so many kind of, like, drunken mishaps that you could have. I was forever walking out in front of cars. And, so, even that side of it, I always do feel a little bit safer kind of that way.

(TC: 00:26:25)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes, absolutely. So, one of the things that I came up against when I was researching for the podcast was how this sobriety and how it's part of diet culture. And I actually never really framed it that way in my head, so I was quite interested to read these articles. And it's something that I wanted to bring up with you and whether it's something that you've had to tackle and speak about.

(TC: 00:26:53)

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

Millie Gooch: Yes, it's really interesting because I had also never considered it until it was about a couple of years ago someone wrote about how sobriety was like the new calorie-counting. And I totally understand where that's coming from because sobriety is kind of in this wellness space and, you know, for health. So, I can see why it would kind of come across that way. But, actually, when you really look at it, the kind of diet culture aligns a lot more with alcohol culture, which is this, like, really targeting of women, in particular, to sell them an idea and a narrative that is actually very harmful to them and they profit off it. So, you know, we are sold this idea that drinking makes you sexy and glamorous in the same way we're told that dieting will do that, and, actually, there's someone making money from that. So, when you're sober, no one profits from that. I mean, there's probably a lot of cake companies that have profited from my sobriety. But, apart from that, no one is kind of making money off you and you're being the most authentic you that you can be really. So, it's quite a really confusing conversation because I think there is that aspect where people think it's health and wellness and trying to be skinny and not drinking the calories, where it's so much more than that. And it sounds a bit silly to be like, 'Oh, it's super radical and rebellious', but it kind of does have that element to it of sticking two fingers up against the alcohol industry and saying, 'Look, we don't need your product that's actually really damaging to us. We can live life without it'. And, you know, these are companies that spend billions of money, like, trying to get us to drink and recruit new drinkers and get us on board with all their kind of fancy marketing in the same way the diet industry so. So, actually, alcohol culture has a lot more parallels with diet culture than sobriety does.

(TC: 00:28:39)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes, I agree. I completely agree with you there. Yes, it's an interesting way to frame it. But I guess there are people who may cut down on alcohol for health reasons, and when I mention that I was not drinking alcohol for X amount of days, I had a lot of people say, 'Oh, is this because of the calories?' or, 'Is this because of health reasons', like things like that. And it was automatically assumed that because, I guess, I'm a doctor and a nutritionist that the reason I'm doing it is purely from a calorie-counting perspective. And, so, that kind of, you know, was interesting to me. But also when I was sharing some of the non-alcoholic drinks that I was making at home, people were saying, 'Well, there's the same amount of calories in that and there's sugar in that as well, so why would you bother?' And I'm like, 'You're missing the point'. Like, it's not like I'm trying to avoid the kind of nutrition side of things, it's purely the effects that alcohol have on me.

(TC: 00:29:34)

Millie Gooch: Yes, and I think that's so important as well in that conversation is that we can't, like, categorise alcohol as like a drink or a food, it's a drug, so it's a totally different conversation. You're not putting cocaine in that same bracket. If you started saying, 'Oh, I'm going to cut down on my cocaine use', no one is going to say, 'Oh, is this part of diet culture?' And alcohol is a drug. And I think we've kind of also done that to ourselves because (TC 00:30:00) we say 'I'm not drinking' and you constantly associate drinking with alcohol even though you haven't specified what you're drinking. So, I think, like, there is some conversation around changing, kind of, should we say 'I'm not drinking alcohol' to kind of specify? Because, otherwise, we just see food and drink, and we see alcohol is, you know, drink.

(TC: 00:30:20)

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. No, that's true. Someone said to me recently, you know, if alcohol was discovered right now, it wouldn't be legalised. And I was like 'That's so true'.

(TC: 00:30:29)

Millie Gooch: I know. It is terrifying when you think of it like that and you're like 'Oh, god'.

(TC: 00:30:33)

Dr Hazel Wallace: I know. I know. So, I guess there's going to be some people here who do consume alcohol who are listening and maybe they're like, 'Right, I'm interested in this'. What tips do you have for people who are sober-curious and learning to navigate this new normal in a slightly kind of alcohol-driven world?

(TC: 00:30:53)

Millie Gooch: Yes, I think the first thing is just to get, I mean, 'mindful' is the right word of your drinking habits. So, you know, even noticing things, writing things down, maybe keeping a journal of kind of when do I drink? are there times I am triggered more to drink? Are there people I drink more around? Are there particular times that I drink? And just, kind of, like, noticing any patterns, or, you know, do I drink because I'm stressed? Getting a bit curious about your relationship and identifying any of those patterns. And then I would say that there is, like, an entire corner of the internet. Like, in the last three years since I stopped drinking there has been, like, a boom in courses, programmes, people, alcohol-free drink. So, I would say, look, just start engaging with some of that content, follow a few, you know, people, listen to a few podcasts, maybe read some quit-lit, and just absorb yourself a little bit to move yourself away from really heavy alcohol messaging. I think even just having, like, an Instagram feed that's got a bit more of that inspiration will, kind of, help you along the way and see other people who are doing it. I think there's so much help out there now that it's amazing. And I think, I mean, even if you're not on social media, there's so many amazing books and podcasts and people that you can reach out to.

(TC: 00:32:08)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. I found joining your page, The Sober Girl Society, just something really refreshing because of the conversations that you're having and how you're re-framing a lot of it, and I didn't find that anywhere else. So, I definitely do encourage people to go check out your page because it's just nice, like you said, to break up the endless, bottomless brunches that are ongoing right now.

(TC: 00:32:32)

Millie Gooch: And they are endless at the moment.

(TC: 00:32:35)

Dr Hazel Wallace: So, I mean, obviously, we're talking about people here who are not dependent on alcohol, but I am sure there may be some people listening who do feel like they have gotten to the point where their relationship with alcohol is not healthy and maybe they are a bit more dependent on it. What support can we offer for people who are really struggling and where can they go for that support?

(TC: 00:32:57)

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

Millie Gooch: Yes, so there's so much support out there. I mean, I would say go to your doctor if you are worried that you might be dependent on alcohol because if you do need to go through like a medical withdrawal that kind of needs to be done under supervision. So, I would also say go to your doctor. And then the other thing is, you know, there's amazing support lines out there and charities that you can go to. You could go to an AA meeting. There's amazing charities out there like Alcohol Change, and Nacao and so many that you can go to. We Are With You is another great one. So, there really is help out there. I've actually just got just in the highlights of my Instagram page there's a link with all the kind of hotlines that you can ring if you are struggling. So, I would say that that is your first point of call. But definitely go to your doctor if you are worried about having an alcohol dependency.

(TC: 00:33:41)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes, I completely echo that. And, so, to finish off, for people who want to read, find out more about this, is The Sober Girl Society the best page or your own personal page?

(TC: 00:33:52)

Millie Gooch: You can come to both. So, Sober Girl Society is more the community, so that's where we run kind of like our events and our meet-ups if you want to come and meet like-minded people. And then I also talk about it a lot of my personal page. That's kind of like more my experience. And then, yes, the book, The Sober Girl Society Handbook, is out, so that's a mixture of both really. It's a bit of my story and then also just some, like, really practical tips from me and other people in the community.

(TC: 00:34:18)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. I have the book and I love it.

(TC: 00:34:20)

Millie Gooch: Oh, thank you.

(TC: 00:34:22)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. Also the branding is so cool. It makes it feel like-, because I think when we think about sobriety it can often feel very, like, old-fashioned and a little bit boring like you mentioned earlier. But it's so refreshing to have it like, you know, reframed by a young woman, and also have, like, this group of women behind you who are, like, all doing it, and you're like, actually, you can do it any age and it's not that it's uncool, it's actually pretty cool.

(TC: 00:34:46)

Millie Gooch: Aww. Well, I love that. I'm glad that comes across because that's my main aim. I think when I first started looking for pages, everything was really-, you know, like you say, even the branding, it was dark and it was kind of this is what you give up and this is what you leave behind. And, actually, my experience in sobriety was really positive and I'm not saying everything was sparkles and rainbows, but I felt much better in myself and I just couldn't find anything that really reflected that. So, I wanted to, you know, create something that was actually appealing and wouldn't put people off sobriety but actually encourage them to get mindful about their alcohol consumption.

(TC: 00:35:20)

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes. I love that message. And I think that's definitely what I feel like I get from the page.

(TC: 00:35:26)

Millie Gooch: Aww, good.

(TC: 00:35:27)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Yes, and it's so good. Well, thank you so much for coming on. It was a really lovely conversation. And, well, I'm sure that we've inspired a lot of people.

(TC: 00:35:35)

Millie Gooch: Aww, well, thank you so much for having me. Yes, hopefully.

(TC: 00:35:40)

Dr Hazel Wallace: Okay, team, that was Millie. I hope you enjoyed the conversation. It was potentially slightly different to the conversations we normally have on here, but all related to our physical and mental health, and that's the most important thing. I just want to, I guess, emphasise the last message, and that is if you or someone you know needs support with cutting down or stopping drinking, please do seek support from your GP because, if you are dependent on alcohol, stopping drinking suddenly can be very dangerous. And, so, it should be done under medical supervision. Drinkline is the national alcohol helpline, so you can call 0300 123 1110, and they're open weekdays 9:00am to 8:00pm, and weekends 11:00am to 4:00pm. I would be really interested to hear your feedback on this episode. And, I you did love it, make sure to give it a review, a rating, hopefully five stars, and share it with your friends and family. And I'll see you again next time.

- *The information here should not be taken as medical advice. The content here is for informational purposes only. Please consult your usual healthcare provider for any medical questions. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors*