

'I realised I had to stop drinking completely'



OLIVIA GREENWAY, who is 56 and lives in Surrey with her daughter, writes about having to quit drinking completely.

"Recently, we were at a party for my partner's boss. Superb wine was freely flowing, and he'd ordered the best Champagne. Everyone had a glass of Dom Pérignon. Except me. I held my glass of sparkling water and smiled broadly. A few years before, I'd have been embarrassed about not drinking, but now it feels as natural as sleeping.

I used to drink, and I used to drink too much. Giving up drinking has been very empowering. I feel like I can do almost anything. I'm in excellent health and, as well as running a busy website, I bake for our local Friday market, and also volunteer as an elected trustee for a national charity.

Shortly after the birth of my second child, at 41, life started spiralling out of control. I was working full time teaching English, cooking dinner for four of us, gardening, entertaining, and trying to be the perfect mother, wife, daughter and friend. To cope with it all, I started to drink. I had a drink as a reward for hard work, to calm me down, cheer me up, because it was the weekend, because I'd had a bad

day. In the end, I didn't need an excuse.

The best way to give up drinking is to never have another drink. It sounds so obvious. So I stopped, on the day I felt I couldn't stand myself any longer. I'd reached rock bottom. I then read up everything there is on alcoholism, and joined an online support group.

For the first few days, I couldn't sleep, so I tapped away on the keyboard into the early hours, talking to my online buddies. I cried. I mourned my lost life, waiting for the longing for a drink to go. Weeks went by.

Eventually, the physical pain eased, but then my husband moved out. There had been cracks before, but I covered them by drinking. I remember my daughter screaming that she hated me, blaming me for her father's departure. My best friend dropped me, others stopped contacting me. How could they invite me to a dinner party now I was single and, even worse, didn't drink? Wouldn't I put a downer on things? I was broke and lonely. I ached for a drink. But something made me keep going. Finally, life started to be good again.

It's been seven years now and I haven't touched a drop. I can honestly say that I've never been more contented. Most importantly, I quite like myself. And my daughter often says she loves me." **w&h**