# "I knew I didn’t want to have that roller coaster of emotions that comes with heavy drinking."

It's been 30 years since [Dave Hughes](https://davehughes.com.au/) gave up drinking for good.

Today, he is one of Australia’s most successful comedians, television and radio hosts and all-round entertainers. But before this, he was living a different life.

Three decades ago, in the Victorian country town of Warrnambool, Hughes was binge drinking, sometimes heavily, for several years.

“From the age of 15 to the age of 21, I would get blackout drunk on the weekends, or whenever I had the opportunity,” Hughes told FARE (Foundation of Alcohol Research and Education).

“You put yourself in such a vulnerable position. I used to get locked up a bit. I was never violent, but I would get found in the bloody street a mess, lying on the ground or something and I would end up in the clink.”

This is when he realised drinking alcohol had become “very dangerous” and he decided to give it up.

“It was around the end of October one year, and I basically thought to myself, I don’t want to do this anymore.”

Hughes made the decision to stop drinking until Christmas Eve, which was around six weeks away.

“When it was Christmas Eve, I thought about how good I felt and how much more control I had. That’s when I decided never to drink again.”

### Starting his sober journey

Looking back to when he was binge drinking, Hughes didn’t have the drive or direction that has taken him to the top of the Australian entertainment world.

“Back then I hadn’t started stand-up comedy,” he said.

“I dropped out of a couple of university degrees, and I was certainly trying to find my way in life.

“I had no money, and my parents were looking at me and asking themselves, ‘What is going to happen to this guy? Are we going to be paying his rent for the rest of his life?’

“I was very unsettled. Stopping drinking definitely helped me focus 100 per cent.”

Those early days after Hughes stopped drinking his mates accepted his decision rather quickly.

“No one put pressure on me, and I became the designated driver,” he said.

But just because his friends had his back doesn’t mean that it was easy for him to give up alcohol.

“You do feel pressure certainly in social situations, especially when you first start to stop,” he said.

“People look at you weird because you’re not drinking. They wonder why. But I was able to get through that and continue the streak.”

### Living the sober life

Soon after he stopped drinking, Hughes noticed a real change in his mental health.

“Life turned around very quickly for me afterwards, as in mentally,” he said.

“I just felt a lot better straight away.

“I knew I didn’t want to have that roller coaster of emotions that comes with heavy drinking.”

Once he realised how much better he felt, it was easy for him to continue being sober – a decision that was integral in having the career that he has had.

Freshly sober at the age of 22, Hughes moved to Perth and began his comedy career.

“I started comedy not long after I stopped drinking, maybe four months after that,” he said.

“I don’t think I would have had the mental capacity to do comedy if I had kept drinking.”

He remembers many years spending time in boozy bars after he started his comedy career, but he never touched a drop of alcohol.

“Much of my work over the last 30 years has been in pubs and clubs and comedy venues where alcohol is very much part of the night,” he said.

“I just made the decision not to drink in those situations and stuck to it.”

“It would be easy as a stand-up comedian to fall into a habit of having a few drinks before they get on stage, or after a gig to wind down.

“But for me I accepted the fact I didn’t want to drink, so that was never a thing I was interested in.”

While sober, he met his wife Holly, who he adores, and the couple have three children.

Over time there have been many wonderful celebratory and social occasions for Hughes, and he admits sometimes he does miss drinking.

“I do remember the joy of it, especially when it is such a social thing,” he said.

“But at the end of the day I can still hang out with people and not drink.”

Looking back at that one decision he made 30 years ago, Hughes is proud of everything he has achieved, both personally and professionally.

Giving up drinking turned his life around, and he wouldn’t have it any other way.

*In the coming months, we will be regularly sharing stories like Dave’s on our website.* [*Sign up to the FARE e-mail list*](https://fare.org.au/action/) *to receive future stories.*

*If you have experiences to share – short or long – that can help people know they are not alone, please share your story through the* [*Voices of Change project*](https://fare.org.au/voicesofchange/)*.*