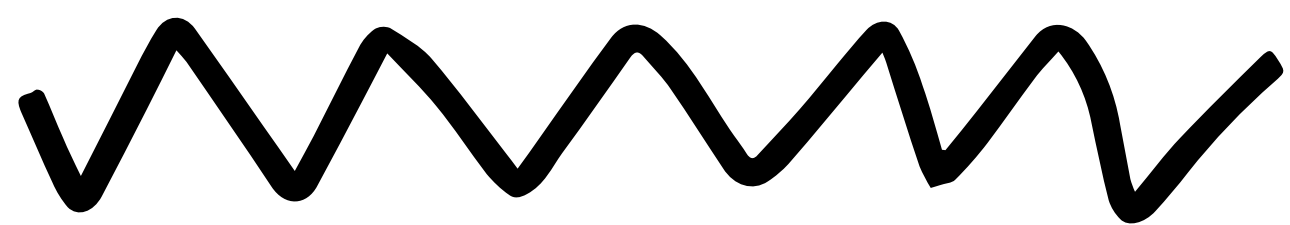


DRY JANUARY

DRINKING AND MENTAL HEALTH



As the joys of Christmas festivities pass, you may be feeling the need to take part in Dry January. We've put together some information on how alcohol affects your mental and physical health to help show you just how important going sober can be for yourself.

Christmas and New Year is a time when it is very easy to overindulge. Alcohol guidelines recommend that both men and women drink no more than 14 units a week, to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level. If you do drink as much as 14 units a week, it's best to spread this evenly over three days or more – don't 'save up' your units for a particular day or a party. Binge drinking is associated with particular risks to health, including damage to the liver, heart, brain and stomach.

DRY JANUARY ARE YOU IN?

31 days alcohol-free, a break and a total reset for the body and mind with Alcohol Change UK. Sleep better and have more energy, improve your mental health and concentration, look fabulous and get brighter skin, save money and feel an amazing sense of achievement.

IT'S ABOUT YOU TAKING A
BREAK, LIVING BETTER, FEELING
BETTER. STARTING YOUR NEW
YEAR, THE RIGHT WAY.

WHY DO DRY JANUARY?

1. What you'll notice

See your skin get brighter, your wallet fuller, your days busier. Feel your step get bouncier, your mind calmer, your nights sleepier. Most people who do Dry January see a whole host of obvious benefits that make Dry January the perfect start to the New Year.



2. On the inside

A month alcohol-free has a lot of benefits: research published in 2018, conducted by the Royal Free Hospital and published in the British Medical Journal, found that a month off:

- Lowers blood pressure
- Reduces diabetes risk
- Lowers cholesterol
- Reduces levels of cancer-related proteins in the blood.



3. Long-term change

The real magic happens when Dry January is over. Dry January helps people to drink more healthily year-round. Research conducted by the University of Sussex has found that six months after Dry January more than 70% of people who take on the month with Alcohol Change UK's Try Dry app or coaching emails are still drinking more healthily. On top of that, they have boosted levels of wellbeing, and much more besides.

Alcohol and Mental Health



Alcohol and mental health are closely linked. Drinking too much can affect your well-being. Some people may drink to try to relieve the symptoms of mental ill-health.

People drink for many reasons: to celebrate, socialise, commiserate or drown our sorrows. We may drink to try and change our mood: to feel more relaxed, courageous or confident.

However, the effect of alcohol is only temporary. As it wears off, we often feel worse because of how alcohol withdrawal affects our brain and body. You may feel like alcohol is your coping mechanism: a way to deal with depression, stress, anxiety or other difficult feelings. You might be nervous about what life would be like if you stopped drinking or cut back. But relying on alcohol to manage your mental well-being can become a problem in itself. There's no shame in asking for help and exploring what a new relationship with alcohol could look like.

How alcohol affects your brain

Alcohol is a depressant, which can disrupt the balance of neurotransmitters (chemical messengers) in your brain and affect your feelings, thoughts and behaviour. Alcohol affects the part of your brain that controls inhibition, so you may feel relaxed, less anxious, and more confident after a drink. But these effects quickly wear off.. The chemical changes in your brain can soon lead to more negative feelings, such as anger, depression or anxiety, regardless of your mood.

Alcohol also slows down how your brain processes information, making it harder to work out what you're really feeling and the possible consequences of your actions. In the long-term, alcohol uses up and reduces the number of neurotransmitters in our brains, but we need a certain level to ward off anxiety and depression. This can make you want to drink more to relieve these difficult feelings – which can start a cycle of dependence.

How alcohol affects your body

In the short-term, drinking too much can lead to alcohol poisoning, sleep problems, an upset stomach, bloating and migraines. It may make you behave recklessly or aggressively, have an accident or become the victim of violence. Drinking a lot for many years will take its toll on your body. Long-term alcohol misuse increases your risk of serious health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, liver disease and cancer.

Alcohol, suicide and self-harm

Because alcohol can make you lose your inhibitions and act more impulsively, it may lead to actions such as self-harm or suicide. Heavy drinking is also linked to suicidal thoughts and attempts.

If you're having suicidal feelings, you can call Samaritans free any time.

Call 999 or go to A&E if you've hurt yourself or think you might act on suicidal thoughts.

Some tips for managing your drinking:

- eat before or while drinking and avoid salty snacks, which make you thirsty
- be assertive – don't be pressured into drinking more than you want to
- know your limits and stick to them
- stay busy, don't just sit and drink
- try not to confuse large measures of alcohol with standard measures (for example, a glass of wine served at a party or at home may be much larger than the standard 125ml)



- keep track of your drinks and don't let people top up your drink until it's finished
- try alternating alcoholic drinks with water or other non-alcoholic drinks
- add plenty of mixer to your drinks to make them last longer
- avoid rounds, 'shouts' and kitties – drink at your own pace, not someone else's
- drink slowly – take sips, not gulps
- don't mix alcohol with any other drugs, including prescription medication

Getting support

Talk to your GP. It might feel difficult, but they will have heard from many other people going through something similar and will want to help you.

They can check your physical health and put you in touch with local support, such as an NHS drug and alcohol service. You can also ask about other support groups or talking therapies to help you.

If you're physically dependent on alcohol and need to stop drinking completely, stopping suddenly could be harmful. Your GP can give you advice and/or medication to help you do this safely. If you have a severe mental health problem and a drinking problem, you may be given a 'dual diagnosis'. If so, mental health services should be in charge of your treatment, rather than drug and alcohol services. Find out more on our drugs and mental health page.

Ways to help yourself

If you want to cut down on your drinking, avoid situations where you're tempted to drink. If you usually socialise in the pub, think about other activities you could enjoy with friends: going to the cinema, doing an activity together or trying an evening class.

Club Soda – which can help you become more mindful about drinking has more tips on socialising sober.

Changing your habits can be tough. Talking to people you trust about your plans may help you change. They can encourage you along the way and keep you company if you're using exercise or other tactics to help you cope. The NHS website has tips on cutting down.

Useful resources and information

- Al-Anon offers support and understanding to the family and friends of problem drinkers.

www.al-anonuk.org.uk

- Alcohol Change UK campaign for better alcohol policies and improved support for people whose lives are affected by alcohol problems. They offer help and support if you want to change your drinking habits.

www.alcoholchange.org.uk

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) runs free self-help groups for anyone who thinks they have a drink problem.

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

- Drinkaware provides advice, information and tools to help people make better choices about their

www.drinkaware.co.uk

- Drinkline is a free, confidential helpline for anyone worried about their drinking or someone else's. Call 0300 123 1100.
- SMART Recovery groups help people build their motivation to change and offer tools and techniques to help with their recovery.

www.smartrecovery.org.uk

- Turning Point offers tailored support to people with drug or alcohol problems. This could be advice, medical treatment, peer support, social activities or help getting back into work, for example.

www.turning-point.co.uk

LGBTQIA+ support services:

- The Gay and Sober website has regularly updated information on online LGBTQIA+ recovery group meetings.

www.gayandsober.org/england

- The LGBT Foundation provides information, support and advice to LGBTQIA+ people. They offer one-to-one and group support for people concerned about their drug or alcohol use.

www.lgbt.foundation/recovery

- Alcohol Change UK has more resources for LGBTQIA+ people who drink in moderation or don't drink.

www.alcoholchange.org.uk/blog/2022/resources-for-lgbtqia-people

Lived experience blog

Our team member Natalie has made a blog post all about her personal experience with quitting alcohol. Check out the website below to have a read!

www.awip.blog



A WORK IN PROGRESS

