

Dry January: Giving up alcohol can mean better sleep, weight loss and more energy

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As the holidays end, millions of Americans give up alcohol during a month-long sobriety challenge called "Dry January."

During a time of multiple celebrations, alcohol consumption can easily get away from us. One glass becomes two, two glasses become three, and suddenly, the bottle's gone.

"Addiction sneaks up on you," said UC Davis Health patient navigator and [substance abuse](#) counselor Tommie Trevino. "When someone starts questioning whether they have a problem, I suggest they abstain for 30 days. I say, 'If you can't stop for 30 days, why not?' Then we may need to reevaluate the person's relationship with alcohol."

So, what is "Dry January?" It's a public health initiative launched in 2013 by Alcohol Change UK. The challenge? Remove alcohol from your diet for 31 days. The idea is for people concerned they drink too much or too often to slow things down. It's also for anyone looking to start the year on a refreshed, healthier note.

All drinking isn't equal

Excessive alcohol use is unhealthy for everyone. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, alcohol use poses other health and safety risks for women.

Even if drinking comparable amounts, women's bodies generally absorb more alcohol and take longer to break it down.

Women who drink are more vulnerable to brain and heart damage than

men, according to scientific studies. Alcohol increases the risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, colon, and breast among women. Their risk of cirrhosis and other alcohol-related liver diseases is higher than for men. And women are at higher risk of developing an addiction to alcohol than men.

Historically, more men have been heavy drinkers. But despite the health risks, the gender gap in alcohol consumption is narrowing: More women are drinking now than ever before—another reason to consider adding Dry January to the list of New Year's resolutions.

The benefits of giving up alcohol for a month (for everyone)

While a month of sobriety can seem overwhelming to some, it comes with some big advantages, Trevino said. He added that it is also enough time for people to assess their drinking.

Research shows even a brief break from alcohol for moderate to heavy drinkers can produce immediate health benefits. Among them:

- Weight loss
- Better sleep
- Improved mood and [energy](#) levels
- Increased physical activity due to more energy
- Better diet due to better dietary restraint and intake of fewer empty calories
- Decreased growth factors related to cancer, insulin resistance, and blood pressure
- A reduction in liver fat and blood sugar

Are you trying the Dry January challenge? A month of abstaining,

experts say, is an excellent introduction to sober curiosity.

Questioning your relationship with [alcohol](#) can be a healthy choice no matter how much you drink.

"Educating the patient and getting them ready for their journey is what I do," Trevino said. "I can't tell someone, 'You need to stop today, you need to stop right now.' No, we help plan their recovery and meet the patient where they are."

Provided by UC Davis

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