

## Want a short-term new year's resolution you may be able to keep? Try Dry January

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For many people, New Year's resolutions fall flat on their face by the

first of February. But what if your "New Year, New You" is only supposed to last a month?

Enter Dry January, a promise to not drink alcohol for 31 days. Launched a decade ago as a public health initiative by a British group, the practice has gained popularity on this side of the Atlantic. A 2022 [national survey](#) suggested that up to 35% of drinking-age U.S. adults abstained from booze last January.

Alcohol Change UK, the charitable organization that started Dry January, says people who participate will lower their [blood pressure](#), among other health improvements. Some research backs up its claims, but at least one expert cautions against expecting too much from a short-term break from booze.

"I don't think whether people abstain for a month or don't abstain for a month will make much difference," said Dr. Ira Goldberg, director of the division of endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism at NYU School of Medicine/NYU Langone in New York City. "It's like a drop in the ocean."

A small 2018 study in *BMJ Open* suggests moderate to heavy drinkers who abstain from alcohol for one month may see improvements in [insulin resistance](#), weight, blood pressure and [cancer risk](#). Other studies show people who take the challenge report some health benefits, such as weight loss and better sleep.

The American Heart Association recommends that people who drink alcohol do so in moderation. That translates to one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. A single serving of alcohol is defined as 12 ounces of beer, four ounces of wine, 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits or one ounce of 100-proof spirits.

Excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages can increase the risk for [high blood pressure](#), irregular [heart](#) rhythms, obesity, stroke, breast cancer, liver disease, depression, suicide and accidents.

Dry January can surface addiction problems people might not realize they had, said Sharon Wilsnack, a professor in the department of psychiatry and behavior science at the University of North Dakota.

If they take the challenge and can't complete it, "that's a signal that they may have a problem," especially if they're hiding their cheating from others, she said.

Studies show people who successfully complete Dry January are less likely to be heavy drinkers to begin with.

Alcohol Change UK provides tools and resources to participants, including an app, a motivational podcast and coaching emails. There's some evidence that people who use these resources are more likely to succeed.

The organization also offers tips to help people cut back on their drinking or quit altogether. These include keeping a diary to understand personal drinking patterns, trying alcohol-free beers, cider or wine, eating before and during drinking to slow the pace of consumption, and learning to say "no" when [alcoholic drinks](#) are offered.

People who think they may have a drinking problem can get help by calling the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration helpline at 800-662-HELP (4357) or by texting their ZIP code to HELP4U (435748).

Not sure if you have a problem? Wilsnack suggests people who try Dry January should watch for signs of withdrawal after they stop drinking.

These may include tremors, irritability, anxiety, agitation or more severe symptoms such as delirium, hallucinations or seizures.

When these occur, Wilsnack said, "it's time to get help."

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