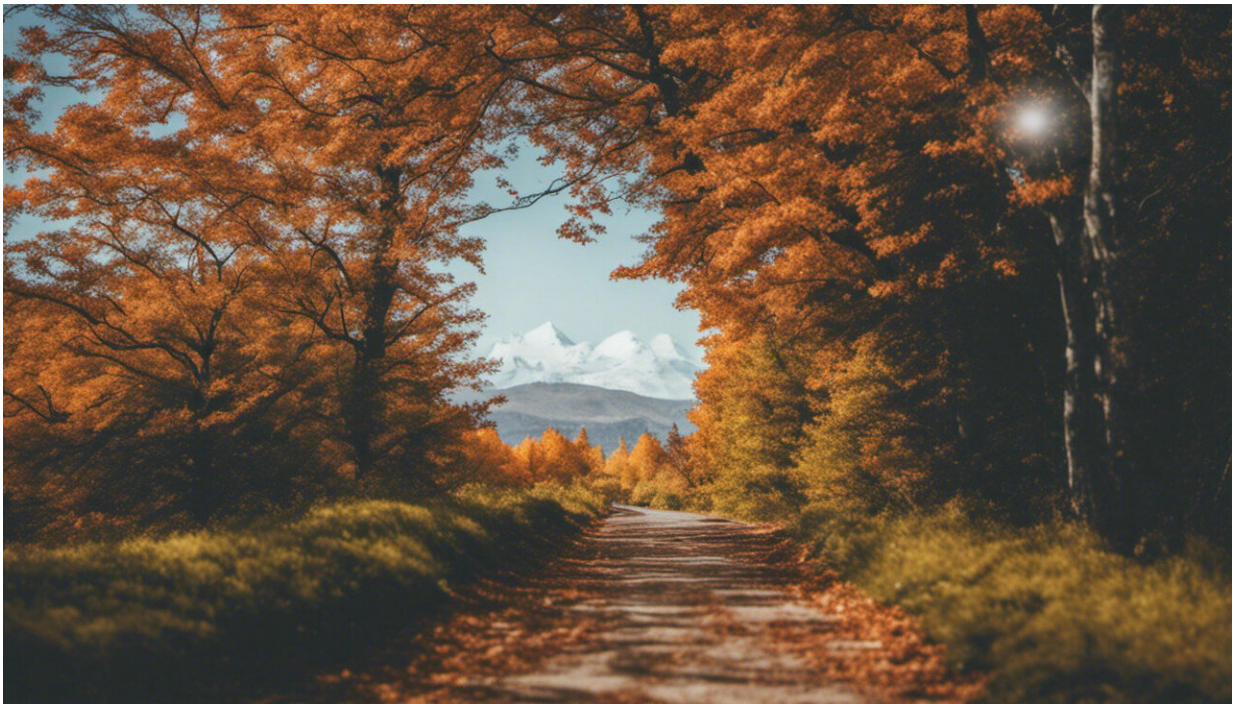


A drink each day or just on the weekends? Here's why alcohol-free days are important

August 1 2023, by Megan Lee and Emily Roberts



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

In recent years, drinkers have become more aware of the health dangers of drinking alcohol, from disease to risky behavior and poorer well-being. Events like the just-finished [Dry July](#), [Febfast](#) and [Hello Sunday Morning](#)—when people voluntarily abstain from alcohol for periods of time—are growing in popularity and raise awareness about the risks

involved in overindulgence.

Many people extend these alcohol-free periods throughout the year by incorporating alcohol-free days into their weekly routines, while still enjoying a drink on the weekends.

But does drinking the same amount spread over the week versus just on the weekends, make any difference health-wise?

How much is too much?

Australian alcohol [guidelines](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) state there is no safe level of alcohol use. For adults who do drink, the guidelines recommend a maximum of four drinks in one sitting or ten in a week. (A zero-alcohol approach is recommended for under-18s and during pregnancy.)

For some, this may not sound like much at all. One in four Australians exceed the recommendation of no more than four drinks in one session with men [more likely](#) to do so than women. This amount [can result](#) in [alcohol poisoning](#), damage to brain cells and a higher likelihood of engaging in [risky behaviors](#) leading to violence, accidents and unprotected sex.

But what about a wine each night?

Even abiding by the Australian alcohol guidelines and drinking in moderation—one or [two drinks each day](#) over the week—can be risky. Possible health outcomes of [moderated drinking](#) include increased risk of cancer, liver and heart disease, alcohol use disorder, and an increase in the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Everyone processes alcohol at a different rate depending on age, gender, [body shape](#) and size. However, for most people, alcohol can still be [detected](#) in the blood 12 hours after consumption. When the body is constantly processing the toxins in alcohol, it can lead to a chronic state of inflammation which is [linked to](#) physical and mental health risks.

There are several biological mechanisms associated with alcohol's impact on the brain. Alcohol destroys the fine balance of the bacteria in the gut microbiome, which has been [linked](#) to brain health.

Alcohol consumption disrupts the function of the amygdala—a part of the brain important for [processing and regulating emotion](#), including our fear response. When this is impaired we are [less likely](#) to pay attention to our fears and more likely to engage in risk-taking behavior.

Areas involved in [language production and comprehension](#) are also affected by alcohol, with too much leading to slurred speech and the inability to comprehend communication from others. When drinking dulls frontal lobe brain function, it can lead to [changes in personality](#) for some people. [Blackouts](#) can occur from the influence of alcohol on the hippocampus.

So, no drinking then?

While sobriety may be the answer for optimal health, depriving ourselves of the things we enjoy can also lead to negative mental health and a [higher likelihood](#) we will binge in the future. This is why alcohol-free days are becoming so popular, to balance health risks while also giving us the chance to enjoy [social activities](#).

Including alcohol-free days in your routine can [give the body](#) a chance to rehydrate, detoxify and repair itself from the toxic properties of alcohol. Detoxification can [lead to](#) improved liver function and sleep quality, less

water retention and easier weight control, clearer thinking, improved memory, more energy, clearer skin, a strengthened immune system and decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Alcohol-free days can also create a [domino effect](#) by encouraging [other healthy behaviors](#) like eating more fruits and vegetables, drinking more water, improved sleep patterns and getting up early to exercise.

6 tips for better drinking balance

If you're looking to incorporate more alcohol-free days into your routine you could try to

1. [set realistic goals](#). Clarify how many and what days will be your alcohol-free days, mark them on a calendar and set reminders on your phone
2. plan [alcohol-free activities](#) and find alcohol alternatives. List all the activities you like that do not include [drinking](#) and plan to do these at the times of the day you would normally drink
3. [make alcohol "invisible"](#). Keeping beer out of the fridge and wine and spirits in closed cupboards keeps them from the forefront of your mind
4. seek support and encouragement from your [partner and/or family](#)
5. incorporate stress management techniques like meditation and [mindfulness](#). Observe how you feel on alcohol-free days and note positive changes in your physical and mental well-being
6. reflect on your progress. Acknowledge and celebrate each alcohol-free day. Allow yourself non-alcoholic rewards for achieving your goals.

Finally, it's important to know everyone slips up now and then. Practice self-forgiveness if you do have a drink on a planned [alcohol](#)-free day and don't give up.

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