

Going dry in January could reduce risk of some types of cancers

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A large international team of doctors and medical researchers has found evidence that suggests people who stop consuming alcoholic beverages

can reduce their risk of developing some types of cancers. In their study, [reported](#) in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the group analyzed the results of multiple prior research efforts to learn more about the impact of alcohol cessation.

Prior research has suggested that regularly consuming [alcoholic beverages](#) can raise the risk of developing some types of [cancer](#), such as oral, esophageal and laryngeal cancer and also, in some cases, colon and [breast cancer](#). And last year, the WHO went so far as to claim that no level of alcohol consumption is safe.

The research team wondered if cancer risks associated with regularly drinking alcohol would be reduced if a person stopped. To find out, they analyzed data from more than 90 studies involving alcohol-related cancers, including cessation. They found sufficient evidence that cutting back or ceasing alcohol consumption does reduce the risk of some types of cancers, most particularly those involving the mouth and esophagus. There was less evidence of reduction in the risk of breast, laryngeal or [colorectal cancers](#).

The researchers note that it is not the alcohol in the drinks that causes cancer, but acetaldehyde, which is considered to be a toxin. It is generated by enzymes in the liver during the metabolism of alcohol. Notably, it is the same substance that can give a person a hangover. Reducing [alcohol consumption](#), they noted, reduces the amount of acetaldehyde produced by the body, which in turn reduces the likelihood of developing some types of cancer.

The research team was not able to determine the degree of reduced risk associated with cessation of alcohol, or how long after cessation a person experiences such benefits. They do note, however, that stopping drinking for just one month, only to resume again the next, is not likely to have much effect on cancer risk. Thus, drinkers choosing to go dry in January

must maintain their new habit going forward if they wish to reap such rewards.

More information: Susan M. Gapstur et al, The IARC Perspective on Alcohol Reduction or Cessation and Cancer Risk, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1056/NEJMsr2306723](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMsr2306723)

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