

## Alcohol Awareness for 'Dry January' 2021

Dry January is the annual movement through which millions of people give up alcohol for the month of January. It is run by the charity Alcohol Change UK. There is one rule to follow; no alcohol from when you wake up on New Year's Day until 1 February! Simple right?

### Why should you sign up to Dry January?

People who sign up for Dry January, whether online or via the free app are twice as likely to make it through the whole month alcohol-free compared to those who go it alone. With 72% of people who do Dry January still drinking less riskily six months later.

### How Alcohol Affects Mental Health:

Alcohol is sometimes used by people to manage symptoms of anxiety and depression, but excessive drinking is likely to make those symptoms worse. Alcohol can be considered as a coping mechanism for some individuals who drink to help manage stress, anxiety, depression or other mental health issues. Unfortunately, although alcohol can help us relax and give us a brief feeling of euphoria, the effects are short-lived and the long-term negative consequences of using alcohol in this way can be quite harmful:

- Overuse of alcohol can worsen the symptoms of many mental health problems. In particular, it can lead to low mood and anxiety
- As the immediate feeling of calm after drinking fades over time, we may feel worse than before
- Post-drinking hangovers can be particularly difficult, with the usual headache and nausea being accompanied by feelings of depression and/or anxiety
- Using alcohol in this way can mean that the underlying mental health issues aren't addressed

If individuals come to rely on alcohol to manage their mental health issues, that reliance can itself become a problem. Individuals may find that their drinking starts to get in the way of other activities and puts a strain on relationships, home life and work – both things that can undermine our mental wellbeing.

### Sensible Drinking and Knowing your Limits:

Many of us enjoy a drink, usually when socialising, but around the festive period we may be finding ourselves drinking more. Whilst infrequent drinking shouldn't do you too much harm, regularly overdoing it is associated with various health risks, so it's important to know how to enjoy alcohol in moderation.

You may not wish to do a whole month alcohol free but you may wish to cut down. Sensible drinking means knowing what your limits are and being aware of how much you're drinking. Simply put, sensible drinking means not drinking alcohol to excess.

Excessive alcohol use means the liver becomes overloaded and cannot deal with the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream quickly enough to stop it affecting the rest of the body.

Alcohol can make us feel happy, light-headed and talkative, but at the same time it is also damaging to our bodies. If you drink heavily, you have an increased risk of developing a range of health conditions including inflammation and cirrhosis of the liver, some cancers, high blood pressure, stomach disorders, obesity, and as we've mentioned - mental health problems.

## How much is too much?

Knowing your units will help you stay in control of your drinking. To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level if you drink most weeks:

- Men and Women are advised not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis
- Spread your drinking over 3 or more days if you regularly drink as much as 14 units a week
- If you want to cut down, try to have several alcohol-free days each week
- Pregnant women are advised not to drink alcohol at all.

Fourteen units is equivalent to 6 pints of average-strength beer or 10 small glasses of low-strength wine.

## Tips for cutting down:

If you are not ready to completely cut out all alcohol for January here are some tips for cutting down as a starting point, some of which you may already be following due to the Coronavirus restrictions.

- Consider drinking low-alcohol beers, or at least do not drink strong beers or lagers.
- Try pacing the rate of drinking. Perhaps alternate soft drinks with alcoholic drinks.
- If you eat when you drink, you may drink less.
- Don't stock up on alcohol - having alcohol at home may make it more likely that you'll have a drink. Try only buying alcohol when you plan to drink it.
- It may be worth reviewing your entire social routine when the lockdown is lifted. For example, consider:
  - cutting back on types of social activity which would usually involve you drinking.
  - trying different social activities where drinking is not involved.
  - reducing the number of days in the week where you go out to drink.
  - going out to pubs or clubs later in the evening.
- Try to resist any pressure from people who may encourage you to drink more than you really want to.

## Have more Drink Free Days:

'Drink Free Days' is a campaign launched by the UK alcohol charity, Drinkaware. Cutting down the number of days a week we drink is an easy way to have less and feel better. Having more Drink Free Days each week has many health benefits, such as:

- lower blood pressure
- reduced risk of cancer and heart and liver disease
- weight loss
- better sleep
- improved mental health
- healthier appearance
- increased energy
- save money

## Useful Links for more Information:

<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/blog/2019/dry-january-the-evidence>

<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/fact-sheets/alcohol-and-mental-health>

[www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk](http://www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk)

[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/understand-your-drinking/unit-calculator>

[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

We will discuss this topic in more detail during the **'Dry January – Alcohol Awareness'** webinar on **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 12pm**. You can register to join the webinar at:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2743267629041864972>

If you are unable to attend the live webinar it will be available to watch afterwards, using the same link.

If you feel you may need some support, you can also contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.