

Dry January

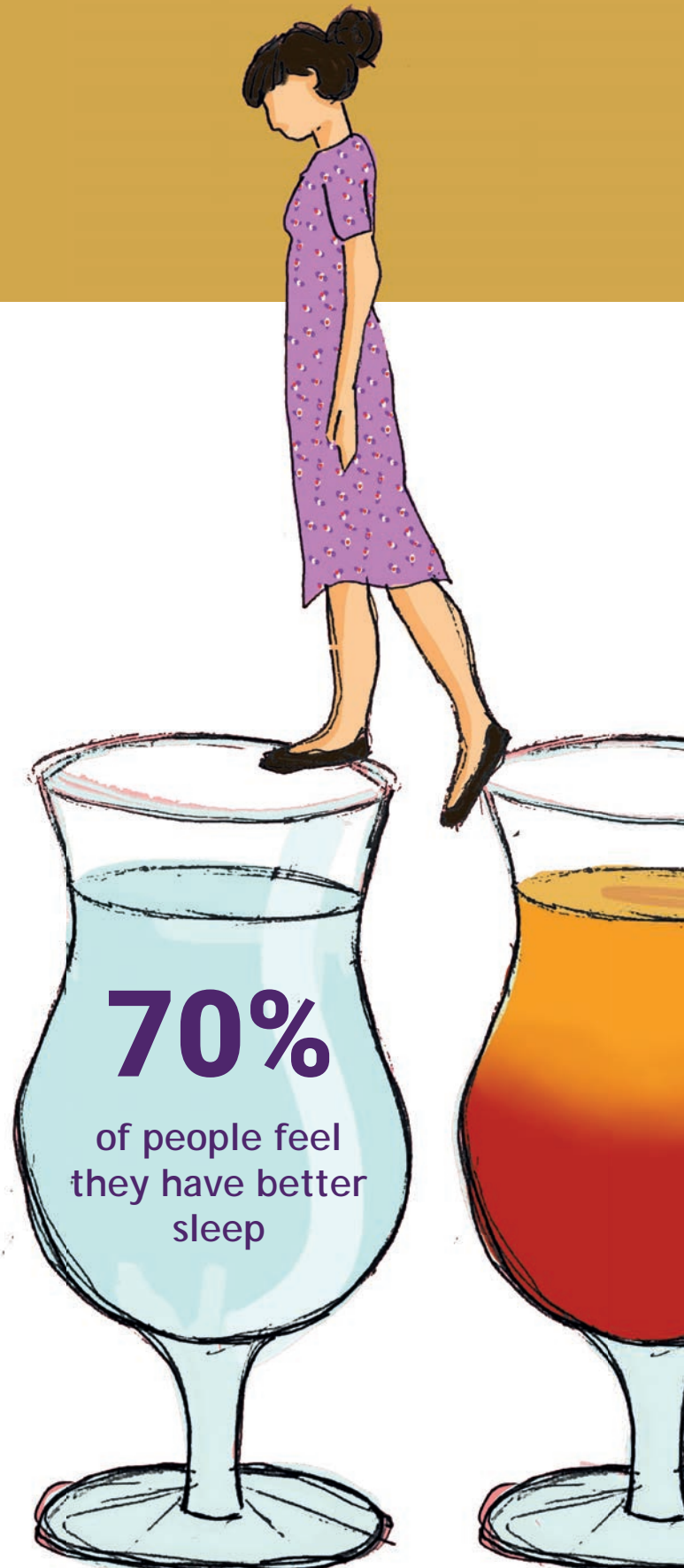
What is it?

In 2021 it was found that around 21% of the UK population regularly drink to levels which increase their risk of ill health (gov.uk published in 2023). Dry January is an initiative where you aim to go alcohol-free for the 31 days of January. It's an event created by Alcohol Change UK. Why not take the challenge and see if you feel the benefits of being alcohol-free.

Alcohol change UK say that 86% of the people who take part save money. 70% of people say they feel they have better sleep and 66% had more energy.

The effects of alcohol

Alcohol has so many different effects on almost every part of the body. It can have both short- and long-term effects on body parts including the brain, bones, and the heart. Alcohol consumption is measured according to units. The number of units someone is drinking and how often, will have an effect on what happens in the body in both the short and long term. How alcohol affects someone has many different variables including their height, weight, what they have eaten and their tolerance level to alcohol.



Units

| | |
|--------------|--|
| 1-2 | 1-2 units of alcohol is when the heart rate begins to rise and get faster. At the same time the blood vessels start to expand, and this is what causes that warm and sociable feeling that most people associate with light to moderate drinking. |
| 4-6 | The impact on the brain and nervous system becomes noticeable within the range of 4 to 6 units. The area of the brain responsible for judgment and decision-making is specifically affected. This can lead to increased recklessness and unpredictability in individuals. Additionally, the nervous system undergoes changes, resulting in sensations of light-headedness and alterations in reaction times and coordination. |
| 8-9 | After 8-9 units' reaction times begin to get much slower. This is when people begin to slur their speech and have impaired vision and focus. The liver plays a big role in the body and in terms of alcohol it's the organ which filters it out of the body. At this point it gets much harder for the liver to remove all the alcohol in the system overnight, causing people to have a hangover. |
| 10-12 | At the 10-12 units mark co-ordination becomes very difficult. The risk of accidents increases hugely, and people can become drowsy. Alcohol is also a depressant and so can cause people to become down and upset. At this level of alcohol consumption, it can reach toxic levels and cause the body to try and get rid of the alcohol quickly through urination. It is this process which causes dehydration in the morning and is the cause of the severe headache people can experience. |
| 12+ | 12+ units can result in a very dangerous risk of alcohol poisoning. The risk of poisoning increases if the alcohol is consumed in a short period of time. Some of the body functions that can be affected by this are the ability to breathe, heart rate is affected and the person's ability to stop themselves choking is affected due to changes to the gag reflex. |

Aside from the short-term effects there are many long-term physical and mental effects alcohol can have. Some examples are:

- ◆ High blood pressure
- ◆ Strokes
- ◆ Many types of cancer - Liver, mouth, head + neck, bowel and breast
- ◆ Brain damage effecting the ability to think and retain memories
- ◆ Infertility
- ◆ Depression



Non-alcoholic drink recipes:

Almost 9 million people planned to go alcohol free for Dry January in 2023 (alcoholchange.or.uk). If you choose to take part in 2024 there are many different non-alcoholic alternatives available in the supermarkets. Below are some simple examples of alcohol-free recipes for some popular drink choices:

Mojito Mocktail Ingredients:

- ❖ 1tbs Sugar
- ❖ Small handful of mint
- ❖ 3 juiced limes
- ❖ Soda Water

For full instructions visit <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/mojito-mocktail>

Passionfruit Martini Mocktail Ingredients:

- ❖ 3 Passion Fruits cut in half
- ❖ 1 Juiced lemon
- ❖ 1 Egg white
- ❖ 100ml alcohol-free spirit
- ❖ 2 tbs sugar syrup
- ❖ Ice
- ❖ Sparkling grape juice

For full instructions visit <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/alcohol-free-passion-fruit-martini>

Pineapple Iced Tea Ingredients:

- ❖ 4 cups of water (237mls per cup)
- ❖ 7 Tea bags
- ❖ 2 tbs sugar
- ❖ 1 cup pineapple juice (Un-sweetened)
- ❖ 1/3 cup of lemon juice
- Pineapple slices, lemon slices and fresh mint to garnish (Optional)

For full instructions visit <https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/pineapple-iced-tea/>

How to support someone struggling with alcohol:

The biggest step for those struggling with alcohol is to admit that they have a problem. Acceptance is key to getting the help they need. Some ways you can support someone with alcohol dependency are:

- ❖ Educate yourself - Taking time to learn about alcohol addiction, what it can do to someone and the recovery process will give you a better understanding of what they are going through.



How to support someone struggling with alcohol:

- ❖ Open communication - Learn to communicate your thoughts in a non-confrontational way. Using 'I' statements can help so that you avoid sounding like you're accusing them or making them feel guilty. Also reassure them that recovery is possible.
- ❖ Encourage professional help - It can be very difficult for someone to become alcohol free alone. Professional help from the GP, therapist or counsellors can be vital in finding the right treatment path.
- ❖ Offer to attend appointments with them - For some they will want to attend appointments alone from fear of judgement. Others will need that accountability and support to make them consistently go to their appointments.
- ❖ Be patient - Having patience is key. The recovery is a very gradual process and relapse is possible. Maintaining a supportive and non-judgemental approach throughout is important.
- ❖ Set boundaries and avoiding enabling behaviours - Having clear boundaries is crucial. This may include being honest about harmful behaviours they are engaging in. Avoiding any situations that may put them in an uncomfortable position is the best way to set them up for success. For example, not attending bars or parties where alcohol is present.
- ❖ Involve friends and family - Getting the support of those closest to them shows a united front. It also means there is less chance of someone enabling unhealthy behaviours. A strong support system will create a better environment for recovery.

How to get involved:

For more information on how to get involved visit the Alcohol Change UK website or simply challenge yourself to making the change. <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/help-and-support/managing-your-drinking/dry-january/sign-up-for-dry-january>

Resources:

<https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>

<https://adfam.org.uk/>

<https://al-anonuk.org.uk/>

<https://nacoa.org.uk/>

