



## BENEFITS OF (BRIEFLY) BREAKING UP WITH BOOZE

By *Your Health Staff*

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**Real talk:** January can be rough.

It's cold out, holiday cheer is in the rearview and the sun goes down shortly after lunchtime. As an added polar perk, this decrease in daylight brings on higher rates of depression and anxiety—which, in turn, can lead to an increase in alcohol consumption.

### Why We Drink More in Winter

Even for those who absolutely love this month (January Jones, maybe? I'm sure there are others), research shows that [we tend to drink more during the winter months](#). Cold weather coping aside, 'tis the season for celebrations and staving off boredom during all those extra hours spent indoors. Alcohol also has the ability to make our bodies feel warmer because it increases blood flow, making drinking a popular pastime at outdoor winter events.

Each year, [millions of people in the U.S.](#) observe a “Dry January” to help curb the temptation to drink more during the winter season. Now celebrating its 10th year, Dry January is a month-long sobriety challenge designed to help individuals “reset” their drinking at the start of the New Year.

### Health Benefits of a Temporary Hiatus

Of course, taking a one-month hiatus from alcohol boasts benefits that extend far beyond getting a handle on our drinking after the holly jolly is done. Alcohol is legal, sure, but it's also a drug—and any prolonged use can take its toll on the body. On the flip side, even a temporary pause from on-tap pours will result in noticeable effects on your physical health.

For starters, you're almost certain to experience an increase in energy levels when taking a break from the bottle. While alcohol may cause a temporary boost in "happy" feelings, it's a depressant, and its absence from your system leads to heightened energy, improved mood and greater mental clarity. Not a bad way to kickstart the coming year!

Other health benefits of Dry January include improvements to your metabolic health, decreased liver inflammation and reduced calorie consumption—bonus points here if you've made a N.Y. resolution to lose weight.

Fasting from alcohol is also fantastic for your heart, and who doesn't want to show their heart a little love in 2024? Our bodies have been under a LOT of strain in a few short years), and because alcohol can cause both your heart rate and blood pressure to rise, *not* drinking alcohol automatically lowers your risk of [heart attack](#) and [stroke](#).

Perhaps best of all, many individuals taking part in Dry January report [a sense of achievement and a greater sense of control](#) over their drinking, as well as an overall feeling of improved physical and mental health.

"Many individuals who do 'Dry January' are surprised by the noticeable impact fasting from alcohol can have on their day-to-day life," said Dr. Leigh Daigle, bariatric specialist at the UTMP Weight Management and Wellness Center. "People don't realize until they try it how much not drinking can improve their sleep, sharpen concentration, and give their energy levels a significant boost. Alcohol decreases the REM sleep phase, which is the restorative, recharging phase of sleep, so while asleep, the brain doesn't recharge correctly."



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## Expert Tips for Dry January Success

Daigle encourages those curious about Dry, or even Dry-ish January, to try it with a friend. Other tips to up your odds of success include tracking how much money you save by *not* buying drinks and finding your new favorite non-alcoholic concoction. We love these [healthy mocktail recipes](#) from the Academy of Culinary Nutrition, and we're especially obsessed with their spicy spin on mulled wine.

## Join the Healthier 901 Movement for Support

Are you interested in trying dry this month? [Join the Healthier 901 movement](#) for free support tools offered through Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare. Using the Healthier 901 app, you can set and track progress toward your own health goals, connect with like-minded community members and access free content like their Responsible Drinking Program—a challenge-based, interactive platform that helps you set realistic objectives to keep drinking in check.

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