

More people than ever (over 7.9 million people) are planning to go alcohol-free this January – and 1 in 3 would prefer to take part in Dry January®

Submitted by: Definition (formerly Limelight PR)

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- One in six (18%) adults who drink alcohol are planning to have a month off drinking in January, or one in seven (15%) of all UK adults.
- One in three of those planning to take a break would prefer to take part in Dry January®, rather than trying to give up alcohol on their own for January.
- Taking part in Dry January® using the tools and resources provided by Alcohol Change UK doubles your chance of a totally alcohol-free month, compared to trying to give up alcohol on your own for January.
- Almost three in 10 drinkers (28%) have found themselves drinking more in 2021, compared to 2020, and one in four (25%) would like to cut down.

One in six (18%) adults who drink alcohol are planning to have a month off drinking for January 2022, or one in seven (15%) of all UK adults. This is estimated at 7.9 million UK adults – up from an estimated 6.5 million last year, a 22% increase.¹

The new research published today by Alcohol Change UK (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/>), the charity that created and runs Dry January® (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january>), shows that almost three in 10 drinkers (28%) have found themselves drinking more in 2021, compared to 2020. Around one in six drinkers (17%) feel concerned about the amount they have been drinking since the removal of COVID-19 restrictions in the summer, and a quarter (25%) would like to reduce the amount they drink in 2022.

The survey shows that for those planning to have a month off alcohol for January, around one in three (30%) would prefer to take part in the Dry January® campaign by using the tools and resources provided by Alcohol Change UK, rather than trying to give up alcohol on their own in January. Alcohol Change UK is encouraging people to download the free app, Try Dry® (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/get-involved/the-dry-january-app>), to take part in Dry January® and double their chances of a successful alcohol-free month.

Research by the University of Sussex published in 2020² found that those who take part in Dry January® via Alcohol Change UK's free Try Dry® app and/or free email coaching programme are twice as likely to have a completely alcohol-free month, compared to those who try to avoid alcohol in January on their own, and have significantly improved wellbeing and healthier drinking six months later.

This desire for support is particularly evident for those drinking at increasing and higher risk levels - who are the people most likely to benefit from taking part in Dry January® according to research.³

Increasing risk drinkers were most likely to have tried methods to manage their drinking (61%) in the past six months, followed by high-risk drinkers (52%), with low-risk drinkers being the least likely

(35%). (Lower risk drink is not regularly consuming more than 14 units per week. Increasing risk drinking is 15 to 34 units a week for women, or 15 to 49 a week for men. High risk drinking is anything above that level.)

When looking at strategies used to manage their drinking, increasing risk drinkers are more likely than low- or high-risk drinkers to have tried the following methods to help them cut down: having some alcohol-free days (32%), weeks or months (12%); drinking alcohol-free alternatives (11%); not keeping alcohol in the house (8%); attending support groups (6%); or seeking support from friends and family (3%).

Whereas high-risk drinkers were more likely than low- or increasing risk drinkers to use strategies centred around trying to drink less when they drink (volume (23%) and strength (11%)); look for advice online (13%); receive one-to-one counselling (7%); and use an app to monitor their drinking (7%).

The survey also shows that people are more likely to take part in Dry January® if a friend or relative is doing it too (22%), or if they could raise money for an alcohol harm charity (14%).

Dr Richard Piper, Chief Executive of Alcohol Change UK, said:

“We know that things are feeling uncertain at the moment and some of us will be looking for ways to try to cope. As the pandemic continues to take its toll, research consistently shows that, for many people who were already drinking heavily, our drinking habits may have taken a turn for the worse.

“So it makes sense to get on top of our drinking using strategies that are proven to work. And that’s where Dry January® comes in. It offers the opportunity for a total reset. 31 days to try something new. Sleep better and have more energy, improve your mental health and concentration, look fabulous and get brighter skin, save money and feel an amazing sense of achievement.

“What’s more, over 70% of people who do Dry January® continue to drink less six months later – so it’s an investment in your health and happiness year-round.

“Taking part in Dry January® means accessing brilliant free tools and resources, especially the outstanding Try Dry® app, our motivational and inspiring email coaching programmes, and the fabulous online support group. If you’re interested in resetting your relationship with alcohol, make this January a much better, richer experience and download the free Try Dry® (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/get-involved/the-dry-january-app>) app or sign up at [dryjanuary.org.uk](https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/sign-up-for-dry-january) (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/sign-up-for-dry-january>).”

Alcohol Change UK offers a free app, Try Dry®, which allows people to track their units, calories and money saved during January, and to set custom goals for managing their drinking year-round.

The charity also provides an inspiring free programme of daily coaching emails throughout the month. Taking part in Dry January® allows people to benefit from these tools and resources. And it works. People who do Dry January® are twice as likely to have a completely alcohol-free month compared to those

who try to give up alcohol on their own in January. And those who take part in Dry January® also have significantly improved wellbeing and better control over their drinking six months later⁴, whereas those who tried to go dry on their own on average find that their drinking is right back where it started. In January 2021, almost 130,000 people used Try Dry®, with tens of thousands continuing to use the app throughout the year.

Notes to editors

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References

¹The survey was carried out online by Opinium between 30 November and 3 December 2021. Total sample size was 2,001 UK adults, of whom 1,414 said they were drinkers. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

The figure of 7.9 million was calculated as 15% of total population aged 18+ in the UK (52,890,044 – reference: ONS, Mid-year Population Estimates 2020 for all adults in the UK aged 18+).

The figure of 6.5 million for January 2021 was calculated as 12.40% of total population aged 18+ in the UK (52,673,433 – reference: ONS, Population Estimates for UK: mid-2019).

2-4 de Visser, R. and Nicholls, J. (2020) Temporary abstinence during Dry January: predictors of success; impact on well-being and self-efficacy, *Psychology & Health*, 35:11, 1293-1305

The charity behind Dry January®

Alcohol Change UK works for a world free from alcohol harm. We fund, commission and share research; provide information and advice; work to ensure more and better support and treatment; encourage better policy and regulation; shift drinking cultures through our campaigns; and work to change drinking behaviours. Find out more (<https://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/about-us>).

How to take part in Dry January®

Download the free Try Dry

(<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/get-involved/the-dry-january-app>)® app via the App Store or Google Play. Via Try Dry® you will be able to receive optional daily coaching emails. Alternatively, you can sign up for just the email coaching programme at [dryjanuary.org.uk](https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/sign-up-for-dry-january) (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/sign-up-for-dry-january>). Try Dry® allows people to track their units, calories and money saved not drinking, plus set personalised goals

and earn badges year-round. People who take part in Dry January®, whether online or via Try Dry®, are twice as likely to spend the whole the month alcohol-free, despite being heavier drinkers to start with (de Visser and Nicholls, 2020).

Year-round healthier drinking

People who take part in Dry January® drink more riskily than the general population (as measured by AUDIT-C, a tool developed by the World Health Organisation). Yet six months after the challenge ends their average drinking risk score has decreased dramatically – in contrast to people who do not take part in Dry January®, whose risk scores remain similar.

- Drinking days per week dropped on average from 4.3 to 3.3;
- Units consumed per drinking day dropped on average from 8.6 to 7.1;
- Frequency of drunkenness fell on average from 3.4 per month to 2.1 per month.

Reference: de Visser, R. and Nicholls, J. (2020) Temporary abstinence during Dry January: predictors of success; impact on well-being and self-efficacy, *Psychology & Health*, 35:11, 1293-1305

Physical health

Research published in 2018, conducted by the Royal Free Hospital and published in the British Medical journal, found that a month off alcohol:

- Lowers blood pressure
- Lowers cholesterol
- Reduces diabetes risk
- Reduces levels of cancer-related proteins in the blood

Reference: Mehta G, Macdonald S, Cronberg A, et al. Short-term abstinence from alcohol and changes in cardiovascular risk factors, liver function tests and cancer-related growth factors: a prospective observational study *BMJ Open* 2018;8:e020673. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-020673

Alcohol withdrawal warning

Stopping drinking suddenly can be very dangerous, and can even kill you, if you are dependent on alcohol. If, after a period of drinking, you experience any of the following symptoms, you may be dependent on alcohol, and you should NOT suddenly stop drinking completely:

- seizures (fits)
- hand tremors ('the shakes')
- sweating
- seeing things that are not real (visual hallucinations)
- depression
- anxiety
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia).

But you can still take control of your drinking. Speak to a GP who will be able to get help for you to reduce your drinking safely.

Official Partners of Dry January® 2022

For this year's Dry January® campaign, Alcohol Change UK is proud to be partnering Lyre's, Mocktails and Lucky Saint – three brands who make great-tasting alcohol alternative drinks.

Lyre's are the Official Spirit of Dry January® 2022. Mark Livings, Co-Founder and CEO of Lyre's, said: "We are delighted to be partnering with Alcohol Change UK who are an incredible organisation, helping people to develop a healthier relationship with alcohol. The three-year partnership reinforces Lyre's category leadership position and brings to life our mission to give consumers the freedom to enjoy their favourite drink with no compromise."

Mocktails are the Official Cocktail of Dry January® 2022. Bill Gamelli, Founder and CEO of Mocktails™, said: "I've long respected the mission Alcohol Change UK have set about accomplishing over the years. They continue to do amazing work educating on alcohol harm for individuals and communities. We are truly honoured to be an Official Partner, and we are looking forward to working together with their team."

Lucky Saint are the Official Beer of Dry January® 2022. Luke Boase, Founder of Lucky Saint, said: "Alcohol Change UK have done an incredible job building Dry January® into the phenomenon it is today. As the Official Beer of Dry January®, we are proud to support Alcohol Change UK and bring superior quality alcohol-free beer to millions of people."

Andy's story

Andy, aged 63 from Peterborough, struggled for years with his drinking but found taking part in Dry January 2021 with a friend and receiving Alcohol Change UK's motivational daily emails was a notable turning point in helping him to reset his relationship with alcohol for January and beyond.

"I've had a problem with drink for as long as I can remember and I have tried to stay dry in January many, many times and failed. So, I just thought I might as well have a drink, life seems less stressful and you forget after a few pints or glasses of wine, no matter, it's just another day! But then it's another day, and another day, and one day you wake up and nothing has changed, other than that you have a hangover, a dry mouth, and can't focus. Exercise is hard, and no matter how far I cycle my beer belly does not go down. My complexion tells a tale of how drink has taken over my life. Well, no more!

"So, what changed this year? After too many glasses of wine on Christmas Eve 2020 and feeling like my head was going to explode and my mouth was like the bottom of a budgie's cage, I spoke with my wife and we both agreed it was time to stop!

"I stopped drinking the next day, and by 19 January I hadn't had a beer or glass of wine for 26 days. The first week leading up to 1 January was hard, but signing up to Dry January® and a determination not to fail this year has kept me dry. The daily emails were a big help to identify the changes in my body

and mind. Boy, am I sleeping and dreaming like never before! My face doesn't look red anymore, and I can see my toes!

"It's the first time in so many years that I really feel free. I was determined to finish, and I felt in no rush to get back in front of a pint glass. My cycling is fun now, and my blood pressure is back in the ideal zone. Thank you to Dry January® for the help – it's a good place to be, sober!

"What helped me through Dry January® was following all the motivational tips and health benefits which were sent to me by Alcohol Change UK, the Dry January® charity. I also wrote a list of 'for and against' drinking too much, which went:

"Against: Hangovers; dry mouth; high blood pressure; elevated heart rate; poor appetite; anti-social; days lost from life due to generally feeling unwell; uncontrolled spending – when I worked out that I was spending over £3k per year I was shocked!

"The list kept growing and growing. Nobody told me that drinking had an impact on nearly every aspect of life!

"For: The social aspect...

"But this soon gets unbalanced when you realise you drink at almost every opportunity – sunshine drink before a holiday, holiday drinks, back from holiday and 'oh-it's-work-tomorrow' drinks, every sporting event (as they're always on in the pub), Friday drinks, after-work drinks, drinking on days with a 'Y' in them...

"The best help for me was to ask a drinking buddy to stop together. We texted or phoned every day and said, "You still hanging in there Charlie?". "Yes" would be the reply, "What about you Andy?". So, my main motivation is not to let Charlie down, and the more days you do together the more it becomes a challenge or competition in itself.

"During lockdown, with the pubs shut, the temptation was to pick up a four-pack or more when shopping. However, I took to walking and cycling, and exercise was another big help in filling the gap of the pub or drinking at home. My wife commented on my bank statement, which instead of 'The Crown Inn' said 'Costa' and 'Starbucks' line after line.

"In summary, giving up the booze was no easy deal for me, but with the help that is on hand from Alcohol Change UK, nothing is impossible. I still have a drink now and then, but the bottom of the pint glass is no longer my best friend. I will 100% be doing Dry January® 2022!"

Teresa's story

Teresa, aged 60 from Pembrokeshire, found herself drinking every day and much earlier in the day and realised her drinking was getting out of control. She began drinking even more during last year's Christmas lockdown in Wales, which she found particularly difficult, until she decided something had to change.

“I guess I was aware that my drinking habit was getting out of control for quite some time. Family and friends had jokingly started to remark on the amount of wine I was drinking and the time of day I opened the wine – always by 4pm, and I would work my way through a bottle an evening and sometimes more at the weekend.

“The December 2020 lockdown meant that it would be impossible to get together on Christmas Day with my family who live 250 miles away. I drank more wine than ever over the holiday period to make up for the disappointment of not having the family Christmas we had planned. And I didn’t even enjoy the wine! My turning point was 29 December; that morning I woke with a thumping headache, the most awful heartburn and the usual self-loathing, and I thought: “What on earth am I doing to myself? This has got to stop.” and I really meant it.

“I looked up Dry January® that morning and signed up whilst it was fresh in my mind. I committed to doing it right there, before I could change my mind. That was the best decision I have made in a very long time, and without a doubt it has changed my life for the better.

“Some of my close family had been worried about my daily wine drinking for a while. They could see it slowly creeping up but didn’t feel they could approach me about it. They were both pleased and relieved that I had signed up for Dry January®, so much so that my husband, sister, my youngest son and his partner joined me in taking part, which has been brilliant.

“Alcohol Change UK’s free Try Dry (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/get-involved/the-dry-january-app>)® app has been a massive motivator for me. I love collecting my teacup stamps at the end of each day. I put my baseline drinking as an average of a bottle of wine each evening, and seeing the units, money and calories accumulating each day has been a huge reality check for me. I cannot believe just how much alcohol I was putting into my body! I also enjoyed the daily emails which were incredibly helpful. The Dry January® Facebook group has also been a great source of support and encouragement. Sharing the journey with others in similar situations made me realise that I wasn’t alone.

“There are so many positive differences I have seen: weight loss, the night sweats have disappeared, along with the bloated feeling which I had previously blamed on the menopause! I feel happy and full of life, but the most important thing for me is the sense of freedom I feel. It’s so liberating to not have that awful feeling of self-loathing each morning.

“I have embraced sobriety and can honestly say that I feel happier, healthier, and fitter than I have felt in years, and I have Dry January® to thank for helping me find my way off that slippery slope.”

Five tips for Dry January®

By Dr Tony Rao

By now, we all know that taking a break from alcohol has huge health and wellbeing benefits but sometimes that knowledge alone isn’t enough to sustain motivation throughout January. It’s been another tough year so if you’ve been using alcohol to cope with the stresses of daily life, you’re not alone. But

committing to doing Dry January® with Alcohol Change UK is one of the best ways to give your mind and body a boost and kickstart 2022.

We've teamed up with Dr Tony Rao, consultant psychiatrist at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and visiting researcher at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London, to bring you some expert tips on making the most of your Dry January®.

1. Make your goal SMART

You've probably got one or more reasons why you want to do Dry January® but it can help to hone these into something specific that you can measure.

If you want to feel fitter: in what way? Do you want to see your resting heart rate reduce, achieve a sporting personal best or something else? If you want to improve your sleep: how many hours do you want to get? Can you use an activity tracker to score your sleep through the month? How will you feel when you're sleeping better or longer? Work out how you're going to know you've achieved your goal and give yourself milestones along the way to keep you motivated.

It also helps to have a 'go to' goal rather than a 'run from' goal. So, "I want to wake on Saturday mornings feeling fresh and ready for the weekend", rather than, "I'm sick of feeling rubbish and lying in bed with a hangover on Saturdays."

2. Plan

If you know there are events coming up or emotional states that would normally have you reaching for a tippie, do your research and planning in advance.

Thinking through potential drinking situations ahead of time can really help to stop you from saying yes to a drink that you would rather refuse. Planning might include removing left over alcohol from the house (or at least put it out of sight); buying in some alcohol-free alternatives - there's now so much to choose from; practising what you'll say if you're offered a drink. Do your homework: if you're going out, find out what drinks will be on offer, ask your companions to support your decision, and reward yourself when you overcome a tricky challenge.

3. Pay attention

The first week or two of any behaviour change programme can seem relatively straightforward but, by week three, your enthusiasm can start to wane. Especially when you've already come so far.

This is because in the beginning your mind is focused on success and you pay attention to your reasons for changing. After a while, other priorities start to creep in and naturally your attention is on other things. It's helpful to set up a routine from the beginning so that you regularly offer up a little mindfulness to completing the month. Something as simple as using the Try Dry® app each day to record not drinking can keep you on track. Or start a reflective journal; even just a mental check-in each night before bed will increase your chances of success.

4. Be accountable

Think about who you're going to tell about your Dry January®.

Getting loved ones onside can be a real boost in these situations and they'll help to keep you accountable throughout the month too. They might even decide to join you, which is so much better as you'll be able to support each other throughout. Research shows that telling others helps us to stay committed to our goals and the marvellous support that you get throughout the month from the Dry January® team more than doubles your chances of success.

5. Don't beat yourself up

If you're a regular drinker, it's natural that some parts of the month will be tough.

Cravings are normal, and if you have a slip up don't think of it as failure – it's not, it's a learning experience. Reflect on what happened – who were you with, what happened, how did you feel? Dry January® is about resetting your relationship with alcohol and finding out what leads to having a drink is an important part of learning how not to have a drink. Give yourself some grace and don't let one drink ruin your achievement; celebrate every drink you don't have. Have faith in yourself and give it a go!

Download the free app, Try Dry

(<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/get-involved/the-dry-january-app>)®, via the App Store or Google Play, or sign up for free daily coaching emails at dryjanuary.org.uk (<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/dry-january/sign-up-for-dry-january>).