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### **Dry January (or February, or March...): Is it for You?**

The turn of the New Year often brings about self-reflection, new beginnings, and goal setting. For some, this means taking a month-long break from alcohol.

Dry January was launched as a campaign under the organization [Alcohol UK in 2013](#) as a way to get people to think about their alcohol intake and to encourage discussions around alcohol, as well as to experiment with how much better you can feel after not drinking alcohol for a month. Since then, the campaign has flourished and expanded world-wide across Europe and the United States.

According to a 2018 British Medical Journal (BMJ) article, [it has been proven that cutting out alcohol, even for a short-time, is greatly beneficial](#). Short-term abstinence from alcohol results in an improvement in blood sugar levels, blood pressure and body weight, and decrease of cancer-related molecules in your blood. Many people report sleeping better, having increased energy, and an improved mood. If there are these many benefits to short-term abstinence, imagine how beneficial long-term abstinence could be.

Although abstinence from alcohol results in a clear improvement in mental and physical health, [dry January may not be for everyone](#). Prior to participating, it may be helpful to do some self-reflection. Are you dreading January and can't wait for it to be February so you can binge-drink? If so, it may be pertinent to reflect on *why* it feels so dreadful to abstain from alcohol – do you only enjoy yourself when you're drinking? Do you need it to have fun? Are you using alcohol as a way to deal with anxiety, depression, or another mental health illness? Are you unable to socialize and go out with friends during the month of January because the desire to drink is too great? If so, you may need help cutting back with the help of a professional.

Additionally, if you are a heavy drinker, it may be unsafe to cut out alcohol completely. [The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\)](#) defines a heavy drinker as someone who consumes:

- Men: five or more drinks on any day, or 15 or more drinks per week
- Women: four or more drinks on any day, or 8 or more drinks per week

Stopping alcohol altogether can result in [withdrawal symptoms that can range from moderate to severe](#). Mild withdrawal symptoms include shaky hands, headache, anxiety, and insomnia. Severe

withdrawal can be life-threatening, resulting in seizures, delirium tremens (DT), and death. If you do decide to abstain from alcohol or greatly decrease your alcohol suddenly and begin to experience alcohol withdrawal symptoms at any time, seek medical help immediately.

All in all, alcohol is not good for your body. Not only can it lead to liver injury (like cirrhosis), brain damage, and cardiovascular disease – it is a leading cause of cancer. [U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory for 2025](#) lists alcohol consumption as the third leading preventable cause of alcohol in the United States. Alcohol is a Group 1 carcinogen, meaning it’s the highest risk group for cancer-causing substances, and increases the risk of at least 7 types of cancer. The risk of cancer increases as the level of alcohol consumption increases, with higher risk at higher levels of consumption. Evidence shows that the risk for developing some cancers, like breast cancer, starts to increase with as little as one drink per day.

In summary, use this January as a time to reflect on your drinking habits, and consider whether Dry January is the right choice for you. The Bedford Health Department wishes you a healthy new year.

If you would like some help cutting back on your alcohol intake, take a look at these resources:

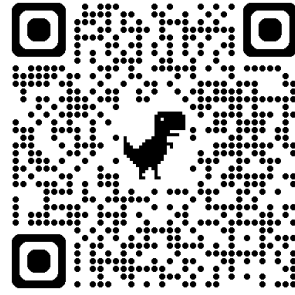
- [Bedford Youth and Family Services](#)
- [Massachusetts General Hospital: West End Clinic](#)
- [McLean Hospital: Addiction Recovery Program](#)
- [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)

**References Used to Make This Article**

[BMJ Open](#): Short-term abstinence from alcohol and changes in cardiovascular risk factors, liver function tests and cancer-related growth factors: a prospective observational study



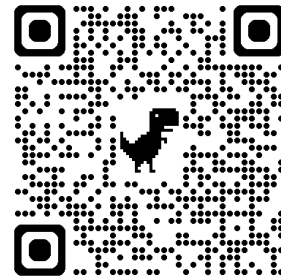
[Massachusetts General Hospital: Should You Try Dry January?](#)



[National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: The Basics: Defining How Much Alcohol is Too Much](#)



[Time: The Origins of Dry January](#)



[U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory: Alcohol and Cancer Risk 2025](#)

