

AMIAN HEALTH & WELLBEING - JANUARY 2017



The Benefits of Taking on Dry January

Taking on the challenge of giving up booze for a month could have lots of potential perks. Just imagine what awesome things you could achieve in an iron willed month without hangovers.

You will:

- Feel more **energetic** and get more things done
- Sleep better or even snore less
- Cut the boozy calories and **lose weight**
- Eat more healthily and increase your activity to get the maximum benefit

- Make small changes that fit into your everyday life so it's easier to stick with long term.
- A healthier, happier bank balance
- A sense of achievement
- A fresh outlook on your alcohol consumption
- Time to do all those super cool things you keep putting off. Now's the time from taking that yoga class to writing your first novel.

And the good news is, the benefits don't have to stop when January does – and if you drink less in the long term, it could make a real difference to your long term health.

The more you cut down on alcohol, the more you could cut your cancer risk. So it's always worth reducing the amount you drink. Aside from cancer, alcohol can also cause accidents and injuries, stroke, high blood pressure, liver disease and pancreatitis. Cutting down could help reduce the risk of these conditions as well.

Also, drinking less can help you avoid hangovers, save money, sleep better and cut out some 'empty' calories. So it's always worth reducing the amount you drink in the long term.

What are the Government alcohol guidelines? - In the UK the government guidelines are given in units of alcohol. 1 unit of alcohol is the equivalent of 10ml of pure alcohol content.

Both men and women are advised to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. The government guidelines, updated in 2016, stress that even low levels of drinking can increase the risk of some cancers – but that drinking within the limits keeps the health risks low.

Read more about the [government guidelines \(link is external\)](#).

What is a unit of alcohol? - A unit is not the same as a drink. Most alcoholic drinks contain more than 1 unit. The number of units in a drink is determined by the size of the drink and how strong (i.e. alcoholic) it is.

In many pubs and bars, drinks are being served in larger glasses or amounts, and drinks, especially wines, beers and ciders, come in a wide range of strengths. The strength of a drink can make more difference than you might expect – a pint of 3.5% beer has around 2 units of alcohol, whereas the same amount of 5% beer has almost 3 units. This means that you might be drinking more alcohol than you think.

To work out the units in your drink and track you're drinking, try [the NHS Drinks Tracker](#)

Some tips to help you....-If, like many people, you fancy a drink with colleagues after a hectic shift or day in the office, you may find that you regularly drink more than the recommended limits.

The UK government recommends:

- Men and women should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol each week (e.g. 6 pints of average strength beer a week).
- You should not 'save up' the 14 units for 1 or 2 days, but spread them over 3 or more days.

People who have 1 or 2 heavy drinking sessions each week increase the risk of death from long term illnesses, accidents and injuries. A good way to reduce alcohol intake is to have several alcohol free days a week.

As a reminder, a pint of lager contains 2 units and a 175ml glass of wine contains 1.5 units.

'Regularly' means drinking these amounts every day or most days of the week. If you find you're regularly drinking more than these recommended limits, try these simple tips to help you cut down:

Let people know - Let your friends, colleagues and family know you're cutting down and that it's important to you. This should make it easier to get their support. Try and cut back a little each time you stop off for a drink.

Make it a smaller one - You can still enjoy a drink but go for smaller sizes. Try bottled beer or a small glass of wine.

Stay hydrated - Try drinking a large glass of water before you go to the bar and generally try to avoid using alcohol to quench your thirst, perhaps try having a soft drink instead.

Have a lower-strength drink - Cut down the alcohol by swapping strong beers or wines for ones with a lower strength (ABV in %). You'll find this information on the bottle. These have improved in recent years and might be worth trying.

Set yourself a budget - Work out your average weekly/monthly spend (you'll probably give yourself a shock!) and set yourself a budget. It might help if you only take a fixed amount of money to spend with you.

Take a break - It's now recognised that it's very important to have at least one alcohol-free days each week. Make a plan that includes this guideline and be sure to stick to it.

Benefits of cutting down

The most immediate effects of cutting down include:

- feeling better in the mornings
- being less tired during the day
- your skin may start to look better
- you'll start to feel fitter
- you may stop gaining weight

Long-term benefits have effects in the following areas:

Mood - There's a strong link between heavy drinking and depression, and hangovers often make you feel anxious and low. If you already feel anxious or sad, drinking can exaggerate this, so cutting down may put you in a better mood generally.

Sleep - Drinking can affect your sleep. Although it can help some people fall asleep quickly, it can disrupt your sleep patterns and stop you from sleeping deeply. So cutting down on alcohol should help you feel more rested when you wake up.

Heart - Long-term regular drinking can lead to your heart becoming enlarged. This is a serious condition that can't be completely reversed, but stopping drinking is an important part of preventing it getting worse.

Immune system - Regular drinking can affect your immune system and make you more susceptible to colds and viral infections.

Beat the January blues!



Improve your mental health and wellbeing...

January can be a depressing month for many of us - Christmas is over, the credit cards are maxed out, the weather is wet and grey (or worse!), and lighter Spring evenings seem a long way off.

So take a look at these tips to help you beat the January Blues:

1. Exercise more - There is now a huge volume of research that says in addition to its physical benefits, regular exercise also has a huge mental upside. Not only does it help boost your energy levels and immune system, it also causes the release of endorphins - naturally occurring

chemicals that make us feel happier. People who exercise regularly tend to be happier, have a more positive outlook on life and cope with stress more easily.

2. Eat well - Recent evidence suggests that good nutrition is essential for our mental health. Comfort food like chips or chocolate might sound appealing but eating plenty of oily fish like salmon and mackerel will be better for you in the long term and provide you with essential omega-3 fatty acids, which can help to combat lethargy and low mood. It is also important to eat your 5-a-day which can benefit your mental as well as physical health.

3. Be sociable - Staying tucked up at home can be tempting when it's cold outside, but being cut off from friends or family, or not having a social support network, can worsen your mood.

4. Join an interest/activity group - Joining a local sports club or a leisure group is a great way to meet new people and have regular contact with those who share similar interests or hobbies.

5. Practice mindfulness - Practicing mindfulness - a combination of meditation, yoga and breathing techniques – has been scientifically proven to improve your mood. Paying more attention to the present moment, to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you, can improve your mental wellbeing.

6. Set yourself realistic goals – especially at New Year - Many people fail to achieve their New Year's resolutions in January which can demotivate them and affect their emotional wellbeing. So remember to be realistic and strive for goals that are attainable.

7. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) - It can be particularly difficult during winter months for those who suffer from the symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is a form of depression that affects people in the UK between September and April. It can be particularly severe during December, January and February. If your symptoms are so bad that it affects your day-to-day life, please contact a member of **AMIAN** - The service is completely confidential and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is available to all Bolton University employees.

8. Take a break - Going back to work after a break can be stressful. Remember that a change of scene or a change of pace is good for your mental health. Don't forget to give yourself some 'me time', whether it's a five-minute tea break, a half-hour lunch break at work, or a weekend exploring somewhere new.

9. Do something you're good at - Enjoying yourself helps beat stress. Doing an activity you enjoy probably means you're good at it and achieving something boosts your self-esteem and sense of wellbeing.

10. Get some restful sleep - Poor sleep can affect your mood and mental health. Try to make sure you get 7-8 hours quality sleep each night.

Achieve a better work-life balance



Make more time for activities and people that matter most to you....

If you're finding it more challenging than ever to juggle the demands of your job and the rest of your life, you're not alone. Many people put in extra hours, or use their mobile phones to be on call when they're not physically at work.

But even if you don't have much control over the hours you have to work, you can ask yourself: "How am I bringing greater enjoyment into my life?" Try focussing your time and attention on things you can control.

Take a look at these suggestions for bringing a little more balance into your daily routine:

Be flexible. More and more employers offer flexible working conditions. If starting earlier in the day or working from home would help, ask your employer if it's possible. They'll benefit from your increased focus and commitment if you're working in a way that suits your personal circumstances.

Work smarter, not longer. This involves tight prioritisation - allowing yourself a certain amount of time per task - and trying not to get caught up in less productive activities, such as unstructured meetings that tend to take up lots of time. Take stock of activities that don't enhance your career or personal life, and minimize the time you spend on them.

Learn to say no. There's no point volunteering for every project if the quality of your work is going to suffer. Saying 'no' occasionally will keep your workload more manageable. Speak up when work expectations and demands are too much. Employers need to be aware of where the pressures lie in order to address them.

Make the most of your free time. Recognise the importance of family and friendships. Make it a point to plan time with your family and friends and try to ensure that this time is not sacrificed to working longer hours. Spend your spare time on things you enjoy and that help you recharge.

Take care of yourself. Remember to follow a healthy diet and keep your energy levels up. Make sure you have a proper lunch break (don't just snack on crisps) and maybe go for a walk at lunchtime. Exercise is important as it can help you to be more alert, boost your energy levels and improve your concentration, helping you achieve more in your working day. If you let your health take a back seat to your job, the quality of your work will go downhill and you'll end up stressed.

Leave work at work. Try to switch off when you leave work and don't read or reply to emails when you're at home. If you're always thinking about work you'll never really feel relaxed. Take a few minutes to clear your mind with something completely different at the end of the day, such as taking a quick walk.

Go home on time. If you don't manage to leave work on time, you're reducing the time you could be spending with friends and family and stopping yourself from properly switching off. Research has shown that regularly working longer hours leads to a greater risk of heart disease, stress and mental health issues, and does not equal higher productivity.

AMIAN Counselling and support service provides all University of Bolton staff with unbiased, impartial, independent, free advice and support and is a practical and positive way to help resolve concerns and difficulties. Not all staff accessing our service requires counselling, some just need the assistance from someone outside of the situation to help explore possible options and provide advice, support and information.

The service is completely confidential and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is available to all employees.

If you have any further questions or wish to book an appointment, please do not hesitate to contact AMIAN:

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