

Bustle

6 Dry January Benefits That Just Might Surprise You

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For many people, the start of the new year is the perfect opportunity to set new goals, resolutions, and integrate some healthy habits. One popular example? Partaking in [Dry January](#), in which you commit to not drinking alcohol for the first month of the year. Obviously giving your body a break from booze is bound to leave you physically feeling better (no hangovers!), but you may still be wondering what the different [Dry January benefits](#) are.

According to [Dr. Soma Mandal](#), M.D., a board-certified internist at Summit Medical Group in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, there are a number of both physical and emotional health benefits that skipping alcohol for a month can bring you — which goes way beyond the perk of waking up without a pounding headache. From getting more quality sleep to an improvement in your complexion (and even your sex life, BTW), there are plenty of positive advantages to Dry January that just may convince you to try it.

Bustle spoke with experts as well as real people who have experienced a month without alcohol to learn more about what the [Dry January benefits](#) are. Read on for intel on five different perks you can experience when you give your body a break from booze for a month.

1. You'll Probably Sleep Better And Have More Energy

Ever notice how you wake multiple times during the night, sometimes with a slight headache, if you've had a glass or two of wine before bed? Alcohol isn't the best for getting quality ZZZs. Reducing or eliminating it for one month can [improve your sleep](#), Mandal says.

"You can achieve an additional five to six [rapid eye movement] REM cycles a night by giving up alcohol," she tells Bustle. "This leads to better decision making and improved learning and problem solving." That's because [REM sleep](#) — which is the deepest part of your sleep cycle — is important for [cognitive function](#).

The difference in sleep quality is something many people who've done Dry January before credit to performing better both mentally and physically during the day. "I do Dry January every year, and better sleep is the real kicker," says Cipriana Cuevas, a finance manager in Brooklyn, New York. "I sleep so much more soundly when I don't stay up late drinking something while watching TV."

Of course, when you're better rested, you're likely to notice improved energy levels and better-feeling workouts. "I've done Dry January leading up to a marathon, and always felt good going into race day, so I've always associated taking a break from drinking with high performance," says Lindsay McClelland, a content marketing consultant in Charlotte, North Carolina.

2. You'll Be Better Hydrated, Which Can Also Help Your Skin

Alcohol inhibits your [antidiuretic hormone](#), called ADH, which makes you more prone to dehydration. Mandal explains that when you stop drinking, you'll stay better hydrated, feel more energetic, and experience less symptoms of dehydration, such as thirst, headaches, and hunger.

The increase in hydration leads to a bonus perk, too: a healthier glow. "Your skin will also thank you for [doing Dry January] since it will appear more hydrated and [premature aging of the skin is better prevented](#)," she says. And that's a perk that Cuevas noticed when she cut out alcohol for a month. "I also always notice my skin is clearer and I feel less bloated when I cut out the alcohol," she tells Bustle.

3. You Can Lower Your Risk For Certain Diseases

[Drinking alcohol increases blood pressure](#). Over time, this can lead to chronic hypertension, a risk factor for heart disease, says Mandal. By cutting out drinking, you can reduce your blood pressure significantly and therefore reduce your risk for a heart attack or stroke.

Laying off the alcoholic beverages can also boost your digestive system, as alcohol is known as a [risk factor for acid reflux](#). “After a month off alcohol, the stomach lining returns back to normal and stomach acidity stabilizes,” says Mandal.

Finally, giving up alcohol for one month can also reduce the amount of [fat in the liver](#), which can lower your risk for liver disease and liver cancer, adds Mandal.

4. You Can Boost Your Mood

Besides better sleep and improved energy levels, cutting out alcohol can lead to a boost in your mood and general outlook as well. “Alcohol is known to be a depressant, and serotonin, a neurotransmitter that stabilizes our mood, is found to be [lower in those who drink excessively](#),” says Mandal.

One Dry January participant has noticed a significant difference in her mindset after cutting out alcohol for a month. “I did Dry January in 2016, and what I was most impressed with was the effect on my mental health that month,” says Theodora Blanchfield, a freelance writer and psychology graduate student in Los Angeles. “I deal with both anxiety and depression, and my mom had just been diagnosed with cancer the month before [January]. My mental health during this month was much more stable than I had expected it to be given what I was going through.”

5. You Can Improve Your Brain Health

A month off alcohol can help [repair your brain](#) and reduce your risk of dementia and memory loss, Dr. Mandal says. And, since alcohol consumption [suppresses certain neurotransmitters](#) — like [dopamine](#), which is responsible for experiencing pleasure — cutting it out will allow your brain's neural pathways to work as they're supposed to.

The end result of better neural pathway communication? Not only will you feel happier, but your brain health can be improved.

6. Your Sex Life May Be Better

Many people buy into the idea that a drink can help you get into the mood, but alcohol can actually have the opposite effect, according to Mandal. Cutting back, on the other hand, can enhance [sexual function and performance](#).

“Although alcohol can cause us to feel less inhibited, it can also reduce sensitivity around peripheral nerve endings, which are important for arousal and orgasm,” she explains. “Men tend to experience more erectile dysfunction with increased alcohol intake and women can experience decreased vaginal lubrication.” Now that might be a Dry January benefit you didn't know about.

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