

## KICKSTART THE NEW YEAR WITH DRY JANUARY

*Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC*

Have you ever caught yourself wondering “Am I drinking too much?” The answer to that question can vary widely! Is it 1-2 drinks per week, or several drinks per day? The truth is, everyone has a different interpretation of what is “too much.” But the stats are clear: many Americans, particularly women and older adults, are drinking more than ever.

When did this start? Although drinking has gradually been increasing over the years, the trend spiked during the pandemic, as many people turned to alcohol out of boredom or for stress and anxiety relief. After all, this is when the Quarantini became a household name!

While the WHO states that “no amount of alcohol is safe” the CDC defines moderate drinking as two drinks a day or fewer for men and one drink a day or fewer for women. If you’re unsure about your drinking habits, a tool like Audit-C can help you assess your relationship with alcohol. (If the results indicate extremely heavy use, consult with your doctor since there are medical risks associated with cold turkey quitting).

If you are thinking of taking a break from alcohol, Dry January might be for you! Dry January is a movement that started in the UK in 2013 as an annual tradition to combat some of the excesses of the holidays. January is the one time of year seen as a “fresh start” or a clean slate, so it’s a good time to try it out, although you can do it at any time of year.

Studies show people participating in Dry January noted many significant benefits including:

- Improved physical health including potential weight loss, better liver health, reduced headaches, and lower blood pressure and blood sugar levels
- Improved mental clarity and mood
- Deeper, more restful sleep
- Long-term changes - people were better equipped to make decisions on how much or when to drink, as well as the ability to refuse alcohol.

Should you decide to try Dry January, it’s helpful to create a plan for success. Here are some suggestions:

### 1. Set Realistic Expectations

What does Dry January look like for you? Is it 100% no alcohol at any time, or are you planning on just doing it for a week? While there is no right or wrong way to do it, typically Dry January involves no drinking for the entire month. The key is to set a realistic plan for yourself, and know your “why” - whether it’s curiosity, better sleep, or saving money.

### 2. Ask for Support

Encourage friends to join you if they are interested. Even if they don’t join you, their support can be helpful, especially when they hold you accountable!

### 3. Clear out Any Temptations

Out of sight, out of mind! Remove any alcohol from the house, or store it in a place that’s a little more difficult to get to, such as the basement, garage, or even a friend’s house. If there isn’t any alcohol easily available, you are much less likely to be tempted. You want to make it as easy as possible to succeed!



## 4. Stock the Fridge with Non-alcoholic Alternatives

It's MUCH easier to change a habit when you replace it with something else, versus just cutting it out entirely. What would be appealing to you? There are actually some pretty good non-alcoholic beers and wines, as well as hard liquor alternatives. Keep in mind some of these alternatives may be very high in sugar, so it is best to look for the lower-sugar alternatives. Sparkling water with a splash of fruit juice, kombucha, or herbal iced tea also makes it feel a little "fancy". Mocktails have become very popular and there are lots of recipes online!

## 5. Keep Track of How You Feel

Are you waking up refreshed and energetic? Feeling less anxious? Saving money? Journaling and noticing these positive changes can provide motivation to continue when you are experiencing a particularly strong urge to drink.

## 6. Embrace Imperfection

"It's okay if in trying to do this, you don't achieve perfection. It's okay if you stop early or need a drink in the middle, and it's okay if it doesn't end up looking the way that you think it should. The goal is to pay attention to what's happening, identify the friction and where the discomfort is coming up as you're taking a break, and figure out what to do about it." - Dr. Adi Jaffe, addiction expert.

### RECIPE CORNER: CUCUMBER NOJITO

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 8-10 fresh mint leaves
- 1/2 lime, cut into wedges
- 2 slices cucumber (optional)
- 1-2 tsp honey, agave or simple syrup
- Club soda or sparkling water
- Ice cubes

#### PREPARATION:

1. In a glass, muddle the mint leaves, lime wedges, and cucumber using a muddler or the back of a wooden spoon.
2. Stir in the sweetener of choice.
3. Fill the glass almost to the top with ice cubes and fill the rest of the glass with sparkling water. Stir gently and add a little more sweetener if needed. Garnish with mint sprig and enjoy!

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [auditscreen.org](https://auditscreen.org) - quick, interactive self-test on alcohol consumption.
- Try Dry - app designed specifically for Dry January, other apps include Reframe and Sober January.
- Instagram challenges - #DryJanuary or #SoberCurious
- Facebook and Reddit communities (such as r/dryjanuary and r/stopdrinking) offer advice and encouragement and can be a great way to stay motivated and connected!
- [alcoholtreatment.niaa.nih.gov](https://alcoholtreatment.niaa.nih.gov) - Find a quality alcohol treatment provider near you.

### ***Will you give Dry January a try this year?***



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