



6.5 million people plan to do Dry January 2021, up from 3.9 million in 2020

- **One in five of those who drink alcohol plan to go alcohol-free for 31 days in January, with 1 in 4 looking to cut down generally in 2021**
- **1 in 3 say they have drunk more in 2020 than 2019, and 1 in 5 have felt concerned about the amount they have been drinking since COVID-19 restrictions began**
- **Those who take on Dry January using the charity Alcohol Change UK's free Try Dry app or email support are twice as likely to have a month totally alcohol-free**

One in five (20%) people who drink alcohol are planning to take on [Dry January](#) this year, or 1 in 8 (12.4%) of all UK adults. This January an estimated 6.5 million will be going alcohol-free – up from an estimated 3.9 million last year.¹

New research from [Alcohol Change UK](#), the charity behind Dry January, suggests that more people than ever are planning a Dry January to reset their relationship with alcohol after a year when many have found themselves drinking more heavily.

Research has consistently shown that **many people are drinking more heavily since the COVID-19 pandemic** and associated restrictions began earlier this year. This new research finds that close to one in three (29%) people who drink alcohol say that they have drunk more in 2020 than in 2019. One in five (22%) have felt concerned about the amount they have been drinking since COVID-19 restrictions began in March this year. A similar proportion have found themselves drinking earlier in the day (26%), drinking more often (31%), and drinking 'to try and cope' (23%).

Not all of our experiences of the pandemic have been equal, and **some groups are more likely to be drinking more in 2020 than others**: people from BAME backgrounds are more likely to have been drinking more than white people, young people (18-34) more likely than older people, and those with children under 18 more likely than those with adult or no children.²

One in three (31%) increasing and high-risk drinkers – those drinking more than the 14 units a week maximum recommended by the UK's chief medical officers – are planning to take on a Dry January, compared to one in seven (15%) low risk drinkers, confirming existing research which shows that **the challenge is most popular among those who stand to benefit the most**.³

A quarter (27%) of people who drink alcohol would like to cut down in 2021. Evidence shows that Dry January is an effective and lasting way to cut down; research by the University of Sussex published in 2020⁴ found that 70% of those taking on a Dry January are still drinking less six months later – but interestingly this only applied to those who did the campaign with support from Alcohol Change UK, via their free Try Dry app or coaching emails.

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

"2020 has been a year like no other. Many of us have spent the year stressed, scared and tired – it's no wonder that many of us don't feel much like ourselves. When things get tough, we can find ourselves slipping into drinking habits we wish we could break – but Dry January can help. It's our

chance for a reset. 31 days to try something new, and to see some amazing benefits like brighter skin, a fuller wallet, a calmer mind and a better night's sleep.

"Dry January isn't about stopping drinking forever, but it is about more than January. It's about learning that you don't *need* alcohol so that for the rest of the year you've got a real choice. It's about making 2021 the best it can be, and we deserve that now more than ever.

"It's all too easy to bury our heads in the sand when it comes to our drinking. Our new research shows that one in three (30%) of those drinking at increasing- or high-risk levels believe they don't need to do Dry January because they drink 'healthily' – even though the number of units they drink is putting their health at risk. That means millions of people are putting their health at risk, but either don't realise or don't want to believe it. The new year is a great opportunity for us all to reassess our drinking.

"If you're doing Dry January, please do it with support. Alcohol Change UK offers brilliant free resources to help you make the most of your 31 days dry. By downloading our app or signing up for coaching emails, you double your chance of having a totally alcohol-free month and getting the amazing, lasting benefits Dry January can bring.

"Dry January is not about giving something up. It's about getting something back. Get your fun back. Get your calm back. Get your energy back. Get your you back."

He added,

"There's great news for people who want to support their local pubs and other hospitality venues after a tough year: more and more pubs and bars are improving their alcohol-free offering, so where restrictions allow you could head down and see what's available at your local."

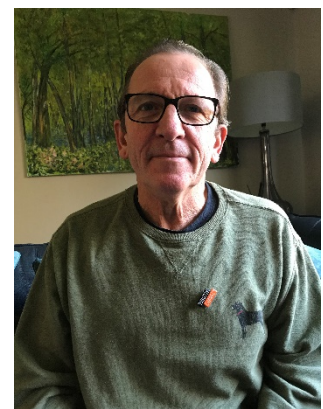
Alcohol Change UK offers a **free app, [Try Dry](#)**, which allows people to track their units, calories and money saved through Dry January, and to set custom goals for managing their drinking year-round. The charity also offers daily support emails throughout the month. Those who take on Dry January with this support are **twice as likely to have a completely alcohol-free month compared** to those taking on Dry January alone, and have significantly improved wellbeing and healthier drinking six months later.⁵ In January 2020 almost 100,000 people used the app, with tens of thousands continuing to use the app throughout the year.

For the first six months of the pandemic **Hugh**, aged 60 from Northampton, was struggling with his drinking. He discovered the Try Dry app by chance and has used it to help him get back on track. He's now thinking about taking on Dry January in 2021:

"Before lockdown I would probably have described my drinking as 'moderate' – but I drank most days. During lockdown this increased to heavy drinking every day – two pints of strong real ale and a whole bottle of 14% red wine every day.

"I would promise myself I was not going to have a drink that night but would somehow end up drinking. Afterwards I really hated myself and felt like I'd been weak – but it was easy to explain away: lockdown and work stress, worry about the future of my children. I always told myself I could cut down tomorrow.

"I randomly came across the Try Dry app in mid-September and it has really helped me cut down. It tracks the money I have saved AND the calories not consumed. It also rewards different types of goals which you can set yourself, including Dry January. Before the app, I can't remember the last time I didn't have a drink for three days in a row!



"I have learnt about myself during this process. I have learnt that I do have self-discipline, that I can do things I thought were impossible several months ago. I can go to the '19th hole' after a tough round of golf and NOT have a beer.

"Long-term I hope to get to the point where drinking sensibly is second nature. I hope never to return to what was happening in lockdown – unplanned, unmetered, unthinking drinking."

Amanda, aged 46 from Worthing, took on her second Dry January in 2020, and she credits it with helping her to manage her drinking throughout lockdown:

"In 2019 I did Dry January for the first time. I managed to keep my drinking on track for half the year on and off, but by Christmas I was 'enjoying' myself way too much. I had started cracking open the wine at 4pm while I was cooking and on Christmas day I noticed I was the person drinking faster than anyone else (again...)

"I knew it was time to stop. All the signs were there – poor sleep, feeling bloated, exhaustion, guilt, headaches, the feeling one glass was never enough, sweats, and hormonal imbalance. On 1 January I committed to Dry January, not even realising the spectre of COVID-19 was looming just around the corner.



"I knew what to expect. I tried not to focus on what I was missing, but to wait for the benefits to arrive. It was up and down: after a very hard first few days of headaches, poor sleep and more I felt great on day 7, swiftly followed by a slump on day 10. But on day 16 I had surge of energy and positivity. The good stuff had arrived!

"Was I tempted to drink? YES! Did I crave wine on occasion? YES! But second time round, it was easier to ride the waves and find alternatives. And with some strategies firmly in place I decided to continue beyond January.

"Then COVID-19 hit! Suddenly I was required to be a working mother, good wife, and teacher to my children. Mentally it was tough. The pressure of being together all the time, the sense of entrapment in our own home, seeing our kids develop very real anxieties about germs...

"Having my drinking under control during COVID-19 saved me. It enabled me to dig deep, be resourceful, approach this new lifestyle with energy and determination, be amazed at my children's imagination and flexibility. I often reflected what it could have been like drinking daily during lockdown – being hungover, lethargic, and bad tempered. I have so often thanked myself for making this change.

"The outcomes have been pretty mind blowing because I have stopped drinking and added other activities to my life. I've lost weight; my friends tell me I literally shine with health! I look younger. I sleep better. I'm clear headed even when I haven't slept well. I no longer crave alcohol or wake up feeling guilty about the night before. My memory has improved. My muscle tone has improved 1000-fold, including (ahem) pelvic floor strength! I have tonnes of energy and motivation.

"I feel more 'me'.

"Occasionally the thought of wine wiggles into my mind, but it's more a flight of fancy than a real need. Will I drink again? I really don't know. I can only quote from my diary on day 157:

'Not drinking has been the most positive and effective action I have ever taken for myself.'

"And if I do fall off the wagon over Christmas (and there is a small chance that I will) I'll be back for more Dry January in 2021."

ENDS

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Notes to editors

References and notes from release

¹ This year we slightly changed the way we asked whether people plan to do Dry January, to gather more useful information for our planning.

This year's population estimate includes people who drink alcohol who answered that they are 'definitely' (6%) or 'probably' (14%) going to do Dry January, when presented with options 'definitely', 'probably', 'I haven't decided yet', 'probably not' and 'definitely not'. This is compared to last year's survey which offered people the choice of 'planning to' (10%), 'not planning to', and 'don't know' (see below).

We are confident that the results represent real, notable growth. In addition to the increase in number of people who drink alcohol planning to do Dry January, this year we saw a clear shift away from people *not* planning to do Dry January. Last year 78% of respondents who drink alcohol said they were 'not planning to' do it, whereas this year 69% said they were 'definitely not' (45%) or 'probably not' (24%) planning to do Dry January. The proportion who were undecided has stayed about the same at 12% last year and 11% this year.

In addition, this year we identified the number of non-drinkers from the number of units they told us they drank each week, rather than asking them to self-sort via a single statement.

Taking these changes into account, we are confident many more people are intending to do Dry January this year. A fuller breakdown of results and explanation of workings is available on request.

² Proportion of people reporting drinking more from different demographic groups:

- Age: 18-34 (40%), 35-54 (30%), 55+ (21%)
- Parents: with children under 18 (37%), with adult children (22%), no children (29%)
- Ethnicity: BAME people (43%), white people (28%)

³⁻⁵ 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.](#)

How to do Dry January

Download the free app [Try Dry: the Dry January app](#) via the App Store or Google Play. Via the app you will be able to receive optional daily coaching emails. You can sign up for just the emails at dryjanuary.org.uk.

The app allows people to track their units, calories and money saved not drinking, plus set personalised goals and earn badges year-round.

People who sign up for Dry January, whether online or via the free app, are twice as likely to spend the whole the month alcohol-free, despite being heavier drinkers to start with (de Visser and Nicholls 2020).

About the survey

The survey was carried out online by Opinium between 24 and 26 November 2020. Total sample size was 2,000 UK adults, of whom 1,230 said they were drinkers. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

The figure of 6.5 million was calculated as 12.40% of total population aged 18+ in the UK (52,673,433 – reference: [ONS, Population Estimates for UK: mid-2019](#)). The figure of 3.9 million for 2020 was calculated as 7.49% of total population aged 18+ in the UK (52,673,433 – reference: ONS, Population Estimates for UK: mid-2019)

Year-round healthier drinking

People who take on 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 on 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.

Additional survey data

- A quarter (25%) of current and past drinkers have taken on a dry month at some point in the past, with one in ten (10%) going alcohol-free for January 2020.
 - Men are more likely to have taken on a dry month: 27% vs 23% of women
 - Young are more likely than older age groups: 40% (18-34), 27% (35-54), 12% (55+)
 - BAME people are more likely than white people: 43% vs 24%
- People have been working hard to manage their drinking in 2020
 - 41% have been doing something to manage their drinking, including:
 - I have had alcohol free days – 19%
 - I have looked for advice online – 5%
 - I have sought support from friends and/or family to help me with my drinking – 5%
 - I have received one-to-one counselling by phone or online – 4%
 - I have used an app to monitor how much I drink – 4%
 - I have attended telephone or online support groups – 3%
- 67% of people would support a friend taking on a Dry January. Just 7% said they wouldn't. High risk drinkers were least likely to be supportive (40% compared with low-risk drinkers at 77%). Women more supportive than men (74% vs 60%)
- Why are people planning a Dry January in 2021?
 - Of people who have drunk more in 2020 than 2019, 31% are planning to do a Dry January, compared to 12% of those who haven't drunk more
 - Of people who have been concerned about their drinking, 41% are planning a Dry January compared to 20% of those who haven't been concerned
 - Of people who want to reduce the amount they drink in 2021, 40% are planning a Dry January compared to 9% of those who don't want to cut down.

Five tips for Dry January

By Dr Tony Rao

In 2021 one in five British drinkers plan to take on Dry January, the month-long alcohol-free challenge run by Alcohol Change UK. With one in three drinkers reporting drinking more in 2020 than in 2019 and one in five saying that they found themselves drinking to 'try and cope' since COVID-19 restrictions began in March, more of us than ever are seeking to break habits and feel better in the new year.

Ditching alcohol for a month is proven to benefit your health, wellbeing and wallet. But cutting out alcohol for a whole month is a lot easier when you're prepared. Here Dr Tony Rao, a consultant psychiatrist at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and visiting researcher at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, shares a few tips to help you make the most of your month off, and make a change that lasts.

1. Be clear about why you're doing this

2020 has been tough, and lots of people will be going into their Dry January hoping just to feel *better*. But what does 'better' mean to you? Whether you're sick of hangovers, want to sleep more deeply, seek to save money or you have a health and fitness goal, it can help to write these reasons down somewhere you can access them easily, to keep you going if the going gets tough.

2. Work out your triggers

Lots of us have drinking 'triggers' – things that reliably lead us to reach for a glass. For some of us it's boredom, for many it's stress, and for others it's the way we mark the end of a long day. In 2020, with our routines out of whack, many of us will have found ourselves with new triggers, or maybe with existing triggers being pulled more often or earlier in the day. If you can work out what your triggers are, you can make sure you're ready for them when they rear their heads in January.

3. Treat yourself

Many of us use alcohol as our go-to way to have fun, de-stress or treat ourselves – our trigger response. This is an important association to break. What other treats could you have stored up for January? With restrictions on our lives in place through much of 2020 it's been easy to think of alcohol as our only option, but it really isn't – you could have a bath, read a book, play a video game, or go for a walk. A bit of self-care will reinforce the benefits of not drinking, plus you get to relish in the extra time and money you have found for yourself through not drinking.

4. Get yourself some support

Don't go it alone. Taking on 31 days alcohol-free with support from [Alcohol Change UK](#), the charity behind Dry January, doubles your chance of staying totally dry for the full month, and having ongoing benefits six months later. They offer the free Try Dry app, which lets you track your units, calories and money saved through Dry January for extra motivation, plus you can set personalised goals to help you manage your drinking year-round, earning badges along the way.

5. Think about future you

It can be helpful to think of Dry January as a bootcamp for developing a healthier relationship with alcohol long-term. One in four people who drink alcohol want to cut down in 2021, and evidence shows that Dry January is a great way to do that – 7 in 10 people who take it on with support are still drinking more healthily six months later. Once Dry January is over, check in with yourself. Perhaps you feel more productive, have a boosted mood, or are just generally healthier. More importantly, you'll have realised that you don't need alcohol to have fun, relax, or socialise. You don't need alcohol to be *you*.

Download the free app, [Try Dry](#), via the App Store or Google Play, or sign up for free daily coaching emails at dryjanuary.org.uk.