



Happy New Year from all the team at **Healthy Performance**

In this month's newsletter:

Benefits of Dry January

Fact & Tip of the month

Benefits of a vegan diet

“The magic in new beginnings is truly the most powerful of them all”

- Josiyah Martin

Are there any benefits of taking part in Dry January?

Are you thinking of taking part in Dry January? Maybe as a part of your new year's resolutions or even as a 'detox' from the festive period (and not to forget, the excess alcohol from recent lockdowns)?

Here, we are going to look at the benefits of 31 days of sobriety.

What is Dry January?

Dry January is an annual movement in which millions of people give up alcohol throughout the month of January. That means you can't have any alcohol from when you wake up on New Year's Day through to the 1st February. Taking part gives you the opportunity to ditch the hangovers, save some money and reset your relationship with alcohol. In fact, according to [alcoholchange.org](https://www.alcoholchange.org) 72% of people who do Dry January had greater control over their drinking six months later.

What are the health benefits of taking part?

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level, the UK Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) advise that it is safest to drink no more than 14 units a week on a regular basis. So if you're going from a festive binge or unhealthy relationship with alcohol, to not drinking for an entire month, will you see any changes in your health?

Your mood could improve

If you often sit down most evenings with a glass of wine or pint of beer, it's easy to believe that it perks you up and helps you to

forget about the day's worries. Alcohol has been described as 'the UK's favourite coping mechanism' and while taking part in Dry January won't cure this, you'll be in a better position to recognise if you're struggling. Dry January can help you to understand what your motivation for drinking is and where you can make long-term changes.

[Click here for more information on alcohol and mental health.](#)

You will sleep better, resulting in boosted energy levels

While we sometimes associate a boozy drink with sending us to sleep quickly, drinking alcohol before bed actually damages the quality of your sleep. Drinking moderate or high amounts of alcohol decreases 'restorative' REM sleep, according to a [Alcoholism Clinic & Experimental Research](#) review. REM sleep usually happens about 90 minutes after we fall asleep and is an important stage of sleep when you dream, stimulating areas of your brain that are essential in learning and making or retaining memories.

Getting better sleep has a number of health benefits, from improving your memory to reducing your risk of heart disease. While you may not immediately notice an improvement in your sleep, over time you will notice that you feel more alert and energetic throughout the day.

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You could notice some weight loss

We've all heard that alcohol contains 'empty calories', but that doesn't mean that your drinks are calorie-free. In fact, alcohol contains more calories than you might be aware of. Just one pint of lager or large glass of wine a day could be increasing your overall weekly caloric intake by almost 1,500 calories (based on 200kcal per drink).

So, let's say you drink an average of 1 pint per day. By ditching the drinks for 31 days, that's 6,200 calories you haven't consumed.

A study by Dr Mehta on the benefits of periods of abstinence such as Dry January noted that "Our work has shown that a month off alcohol, in healthy individuals drinking at moderate to high levels, does lead to tangible health benefits by the end of the month. Our study saw a weight loss of around 2kg, a decrease in blood pressure of around 5%, and improvement in diabetes risk of almost 30%.

Improved liver and kidney health

Our livers have the fantastic ability to self-heal, however, consuming alcohol above the low risk level does impact on this ability. Oli Barnard, Head of Service Delivery at Healthy Performance says "liver damage occurs in three stages, fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis, and cirrhosis. Fatty liver is where a build-up of fat deposits occurs within the liver cells of heavy drinkers, but it is also seen within the livers of those drinkers consuming just over the weekly low risk drinking guidelines". Oli advises that "fatty liver can be reversed by reducing or stopping drinking".

The second and third stages, alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis and extremely serious and can result in permanent scarring, liver failure and death.

It is not just the liver that is affected by high alcohol consumption, the kidneys also have to work harder. The kidneys filter harmful substances, alcohol being one of them, however alcohol causes changes to the kidneys and reduces their ability to filter blood. Increased blood pressure resulting from high alcohol intake will also further stress the kidneys, the dehydrating impact of alcohol will again pile pressure on to the kidneys, forcing them to work harder still. All these effects will be removed once the alcohol intake is reduced or stopped.

Your skin will improve

Your skin shows what is going on in your body internally and drinking alcohol is one of the worst things that you can do for your skin. As a diuretic, it forces the water out of your body, leaving you dehydrated. It also makes it harder to rehydrate yourself afterwards causing your skin to be dry and flaky with fine lines and wrinkles being enhanced due to the lack of water in your body.

Many alcoholic drinks have a high sugar content which can also lead to acne breakouts. The effect alcohol has on your skin is often visible in the 24 hours after a night of drinking. However, by day 3 (as long as you haven't consumed any further alcohol), your liver will have had time to excrete the toxins and you should start to see an improvement in your skin's health.

By ditching booze for a month and allowing your body to function correctly, paired with improved sleep, a better diet (no more late night kebabs) and increased exercise, you will see a direct improvement in your skin.

How much money will I save?

Well, to put it simply, this all depends on how much you were drinking before. It also depends on your preferred drinking location - if you're a regular pub-goer, you'll save a lot more than someone who likes to drink at home. However, it is worth mentioning that the average drinker spends £50,000 on alcohol over their lifetime.

Earlier in the article we looked at an average of 1 pint a day, so let's use the same figures. Obviously the price of a pint varies depending on where in the country you're based, but if we use the **average cost of £3.94** and times that by 31 pints (for 1 pint a day), that's £122 you're saving in January. If you add a big night out into the equation as well, you could easily be saving in the region of £200.

Why should I take part in Dry January?

An alcoholchange.org article states that 'A month alcohol-free has a lot of benefits: research published in 2018, conducted by the Royal Free Hospital and published in the British Medical Journal, found that a month off lowers blood pressure, reduces diabetes risk, lowers cholesterol, and reduces levels of cancer-related proteins in the blood. During Dry January last year 88% of participants saved money, 71% slept better and 58% lost weight.'

If the physical and mental health benefits, as well as the positive financial impact of not drinking for a month isn't enough to sway you, think about some more personal reasons to take part. When was the last time you truly challenged yourself? Have the nightmares of 2020 led you to have a poor relationship with alcohol? Do you often feel like you need alcohol to have fun? Making a change doesn't have to be about your health or your bank balance, but about something that makes you feel good and gives you a sense of achievement.

For more information on why you should take part in Dry January or just generally consider how much you are drinking, along with a number of great resources to help you get started you can visit the Alcohol Change website here: <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/>



Fact of the month

Some alcoholic drinks may not be suitable for vegans because of the filtering process prior to bottling.



Tip of the month

Berries are high in antioxidants, which help to protect the liver from damage. They may even improve its immune and antioxidant responses.



Veganuary: What are the benefits of a vegan diet and is it sustainable?

The vegan diet involves eating only foods that are made from or come from plants. Vegans do not eat foods that come from animals, including dairy products and eggs.

Increasing numbers of people are now following vegan diets due to health, animal welfare and environmental concerns. In fact, [research by The Vegan Society](#) showed that the number of vegans in the UK quadrupled between 2006 and 2018.

What is Veganuary?

Veganuary is a 31-day challenge that asks participants to eat only plant-based foods throughout the month of January. The Veganuary campaign began back in 2014 and over one million people have taken part since it started.

Are there any health benefits?

Cutting out meat and dairy products leads you to naturally assume that vegan diets are healthier. But how true is this?

Improved heart health

Following a vegan diet can boost heart health in many ways. Animal products, such as meat, cheese and butter are the main dietary sources of saturated fats. Eating foods that contain these fats can raise cholesterol levels which increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. Therefore, a lower intake of animal products and a higher intake of plant-based foods can reduce the risk of heart disease.

Increased dietary fibre is also linked to better heart health with plant-based vegetables and grains being the best sources.

Lower BMI

People on a vegan diet often eat fewer calories than those eating an omnivorous diet due to plant-based products containing a smaller number of calories for the same sized portion. For example, tofu, a common meat supplement for vegans and vegetarians, contains just 79 calories per 100g. Whereas 100g of chicken breast contains 165 calories. Many animal foods are high in fat and in turn, high in calories. So, replacing these with low calorie plant-based foods can help people to manage their weight.

A moderate caloric intake can lead to a lower body mass index (BMI) and in turn, a reduced risk of obesity which is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Reduced cancer risk

Eating a vegan diet may reduce the risk of cancer by up to 15%, according to a [2017 review](#). This could be because plant-based foods are high in fibre, vitamins and phytochemicals that protect against cancers.

[Cancer Research UK](#) also states that eating lots of processed meat, including ham, bacon, salami and sausages, can cause cancer. Red meat, including fresh, minced and frozen beef, pork and lamb is a probable cause of cancer but a few more studies are required to be certain.

By eliminating red and processed meats from the diet, individuals can remove these possible risks.

Health drawbacks

The vegan diet is generally considered to be higher in fibre and lower in salt than an omnivorous diet. However, it is also considered to be lower in cholesterol, protein and calcium, all of which are essential to our body's functionality. The [NHS advises](#) that with good planning and an understanding of what makes up a healthy, balanced vegan diet, you can get all the nutrients your body needs. However, if you do not plan your diet properly, you could miss out on essential nutrients such as calcium, iron, protein and vitamin B12.

Protein is essential in your diet to help your body repair cells and make new ones and while vegans won't be getting their protein from meat or dairy products, it can be sourced through seitan, tofu, lentils and most varieties of beans.

The body also needs vitamin B12 to maintain healthy blood and a healthy nervous system, and is found in meat, fish, eggs and dairy. But not in fruit or vegetables.



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What are the environmental benefits?

The positive environmental impact of the vegan diet is huge. Here are 5 statistics that we found the most mind-blowing:

- Researchers at the University of Oxford found that cutting meat and dairy products from your diet could reduce an individual's carbon footprint from food by up to 73%. [\(source\)](#)
- If everyone stopped eating these foods, the global farmland use could be reduced by up to 75%. That's an area equivalent to the size of the US, China, Australia and the EU combined. [\(source\)](#)
- Animal agriculture contributes an estimated 18% to total greenhouse gas emissions from the five major sectors for greenhouse gas reporting. For the agriculture sector alone, farmed animals constitute nearly 80% of all emissions. [\(source\)](#)
- If the world went vegan, it could save 8 million human lives by 2050, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by two thirds and lead to healthcare-related savings and avoided climate damages of \$1.5 trillion. [\(source\)](#)
- If every family in the UK removed the meat from just one meal a week, it would have the same environmental impact as taking 16 million cars off the road. [\(source\)](#)

What are the drawbacks of a vegan diet and is it sustainable?

Many of the statistics above are only relevant if everyone on this planet turned vegan, which realistically, isn't going to happen. Transitioning from an omnivorous diet to a vegan diet also isn't going to be an easy ride and according to a [US study](#), 70% of those who turn vegan backslide to an omnivorous diet.

There could be a number of reasons for this:

- The diet is very restrictive
- Requires a lot of planning
- Not as readily available in supermarkets, pubs and restaurants

However, the same study also found that 37% of ex-vegetarian/vegans indicated that they would be interested in going back to a no-meat diet at some point in the future.

As the vegan diet doesn't appear to be particularly sustainable without a lot of time and determination, a [YouGov analysis](#) shows that 14% of Brits are now following a 'flexitarian diet' instead.

A 'flexitarian' is a person who has a primarily vegetarian diet but occasionally eats meat or fish. A BBC article says that this 'definition in itself is problematic, because "occasionally" could mean once a week, or more, but the premise is to reduce your consumption of animal products.'

The flexitarian diet holds its own benefits – if everyone ate less meat, it would reduce or eliminate the need for intensive animal farming and it's also a more sustainable, long-term choice.

Why should you take part in Veganuary?

So, now that you know more about the health benefits, environmental impact and long-term sustainability of the vegan diet, why should you consider taking part in Veganuary?

Here are our top 5 reasons:

- It's good for your health – we're all looking for a little detox after a Christmas festive binge. A vegan diet is a great way to ensure that you're eating plenty of micronutrients (found in fruit and vegetables), fibre and minerals.
- It helps our planet – by cutting out animal products for a month you are helping the planet. And you never know, throughout the course of the month your mindset could shift and you may leave January as a 'flexitarian' rather than an omnivore!
- Have fun in the kitchen – tired of cooking the same recipes week in week out? Or maybe you never learnt to cook? Now is the time to try something new! Find some recipes online or purchase a new cookbook and enjoy trying out new flavours – you could even discover your new favourite meal. One of the favourite vegan meals amongst the Healthy Performance team is the Ultimate Chilli by BOSH!
- Too much meat is bad for us – from high blood pressure and cholesterol to an increased risk of cancer, eating a diet heavy in meat is not healthy for our bodies.
- According to the Veganuary website, more than 75% of people who have tried going vegan for a month report an improvement in their health. They said they sleep better and lost an average of 6lbs as a result of their changed diet.

For more information on going Vegan and for food inspiration, recipes and supplement ideas you can visit the Veganuary and NHS websites:

<https://veganuary.com/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-vegan-diet/>