"New year—a new chapter, new verse, or just the same old story?

Ultimately we write it. The choice is ours."

- Alex Morritt

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Dry January

The time has come again for us to come up with our New Year's resolutions, forget about them after two weeks and then feel like failures because we haven't stuck to what we set out to achieve. But don't beat yourself up over this!

You are not alone; around 80% of us do not keep our New Year's resolutions!

Why?

- Well, it could be because you didn't set yourself a goal around something you are passionate about.
- You didn't set a realistic goal or
- You didn't set yourself a time specific or measurable goal.

There is however, one measured, time specific and very achievable resolution that you can take part in and that's **Dry January.**

Why should you take part?

Dry January allows you to analyse your relationship with alcohol. Some people drink to relax, some drink to have fun, some drink out of boredom. Taking part in this month-long challenge gives you the initiative to find alternative options to drinking, which in turn can have huge benefits on your physical and mental health. And it's only a month long!
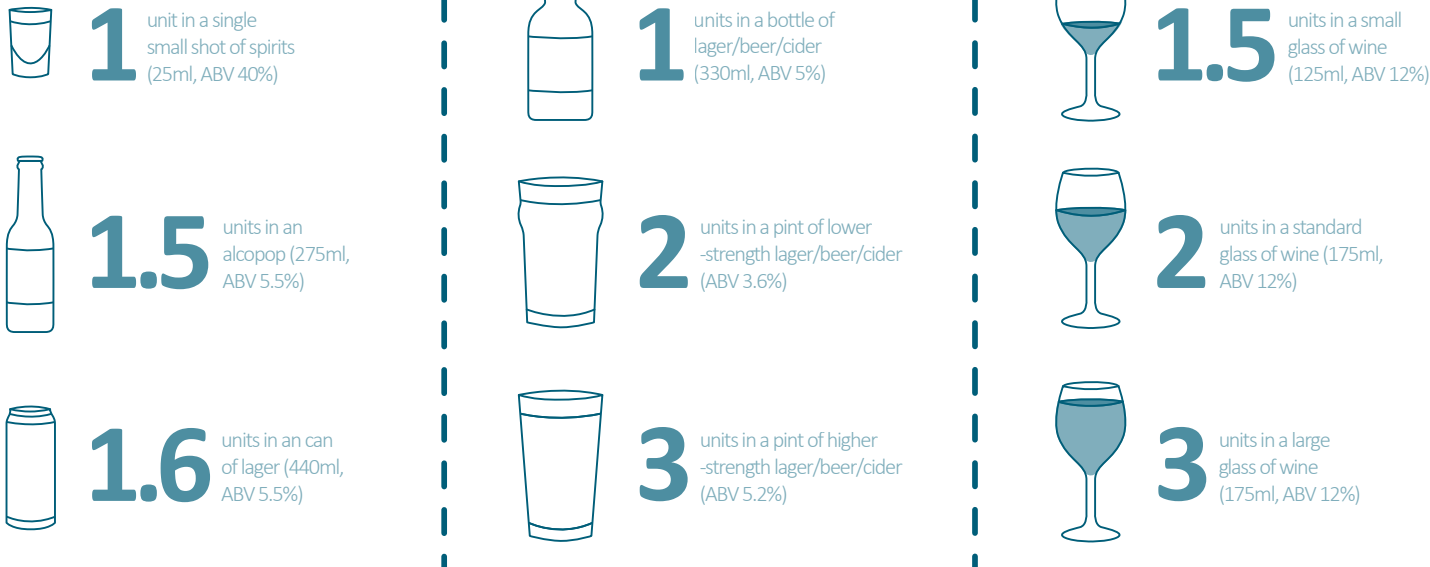
What is alcohol and what does it do?

Impacting the brain in a variety of ways, alcohol binds to a neurotransmitter called gamma-aminobutyric (GABA) which is responsible for producing feelings of calmness and sedation. Alcohol also inhibits glutamate which is a neurotransmitter that plays an essential role in normal brain functioning. In addition, alcohol releases dopamine – the neurotransmitter responsible for pleasure and reward, causing people to drink even more to increase those feel-good feelings.

However, as more alcohol is consumed, the more depressant effect will develop. As an individual continues drinking and more alcohol enters the system, it impairs judgement, vision, and alertness; dulls the senses, affects concentration, and slows reaction times. Alcohol encompasses both stimulating and sedating effects. Although clinically categorised as a depressant, the amount of alcohol consumed, and a person's individual reaction determines the type of effect drinkers will experience.

How many units are in your drinks?

24% of adults in England regularly drink over the Chief Medical Officer's low-risk guidelines and 27% of drinkers in Great Britain binge drink on their heaviest drinking days.

So, do you know how many units you consume each time you have a drink?

1 unit in a single small shot of spirits (25ml, ABV 40%)

1.5 units in an alcopop (275ml, ABV 5.5%)

1.6 units in an can of lager (440ml, ABV 5.5%)

1 units in a bottle of lager/beer/cider (330ml, ABV 5%)

2 units in a pint of lower-strength lager/beer/cider (ABV 3.6%)

3 units in a pint of higher-strength lager/beer/cider (ABV 5.2%)

1.5 units in a small glass of wine (125ml, ABV 12%)

2 units in a standard glass of wine (175ml, ABV 12%)

3 units in a large glass of wine (175ml, ABV 12%)

What are the benefits of going teetotal for 31 days?

We know that drinking alcohol in excess can put you at risk of multiple short and long term health issues. For example, large quantities of alcohol in a short timespan (also known as binge drinking) can put you at risk of alcohol poisoning, alcohol-induced anxiety, stomach issues, disturbed sleep, increased feelings of stress, impaired judgement (which can lead to accidents and injuries), or memory loss and blackouts.

In the long term, drinking too much too often can increase your risk of developing different forms of cancer and other serious health problems such as heart disease, brain damage, raised blood pressure, stomach ulcers and stokes to name a few.

By taking part in Dry January and not consuming alcohol for 31 days, you will see a whole host of obvious benefits that make it a perfect start to the new year.

According to Alcohol Change;

- 70% of people sleep better
- 86% of people save money
- 65% of people notice generally improved health

Research published in 2018, conducted by the Royal Free Hospital found that an alcohol-free month lowers blood pressure, reduced diabetes disk, lowers cholesterol and reduced levels of cancer-related proteins in the blood.

Not only this, but research by the University of Sussex has found that six months after Dry January, more than **70% of people continue to have a healthier relationship with alcohol** and have boosted levels of wellbeing.

Being alcohol free for 31 days shows that we don't need alcohol to have fun, relax or to socialise. It helps us to learn the skills that we need to manage our drinking and that means for the rest of the year we are able to make decisions about when we drink and how much, so we can avoid slipping into drinking more than we really want to.

Obesity Awareness Week 2022

Obesity is defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that can impair health.

Did you know, the body does not make fat, so it's essential to attain fat through a healthy balance diet as we all need small amounts to stay healthy. Fat has 'job roles' in the body which involve helping the body absorb vitamin A, D, E and K. These vitamins are fat-soluble, which means they can only be absorbed with the help of fats. If these vitamins are not absorbed through the intestine, deficiencies can occur such as night blindness due to a lack of vitamin A, or increased oxidative cell stress due to a lack of vitamin E.

However, it's important to remember that excess fat, particularly around the waist, puts individuals' health at risk. There are different types of fat in the body – the fat directly under our skin is called subcutaneous fat and is often the type that many people worry about. Yet it's the visceral fat that surrounds our internal organs such as our heart and liver that is the bigger health risk.

So, what are the main causes of obesity?

The amount of energy in food and drinks is measures in kilocalories (kcal), known as calories. We consume calories into the body by eating and we burn calories by being active. When an individual eats and drinks more calories than they burn, the body stores these excess calories as body fat.

If you regularly eat more calories than you burn, you will start to gain weight. Obesity develops gradually over time because of long-term lifestyle factors such as:

- Eating large amounts of processed or fast food that are high in fat and sugar
- Drinking too much alcohol (one pint of 5% strength beer contains 239kcals!)
- Poor portion control when it comes to meals
- High quantity of sugary drinks.

- Comfort eating (which could be linked to poor mental health)
- Sedentary job roles
- Not exercising regularly
- Sedentary lifestyle (spending spare time watching TV or on the sofa)

There are also some underlying health conditions that can contribute to weight gain such as an underactive thyroid gland (hypothyroidism), although these types of conditions do not usually cause weight problems if they are effectively controlled with medication.

The risks of obesity

Obesity can result in developing a variety of potentially life-threatening conditions such as

- Type 2 diabetes
- Coronary heart disease
- Some types of cancer, such as breast cancer and bowel cancer
- Stroke
- Mental health issues as obesity can affect your quality of life and lead to psychological problems such as depression and low self-esteem.

Being overweight or obese can lead to many serious health conditions and can increase your disk of heart and circulatory diseases such as a heart attack, stoke and vascular dementia. This is why it's so important to stay at a healthy weight and help to prevent these conditions from occurring.

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The implications of obesity in the workplace

Research has shown that obese employees take more short and long-term periods of sickness absence. According to Public Health England, there are significant workplace costs associated with obesity. For a large organisation employing 1000 people, lost productivity caused by obesity could be costing more than £126,000 annually.

Obesity can also increase the risk of some work-related injuries, namely musculoskeletal disorders, stress and vibration induced injury. Repetitive movements can also be problematic and can cause injuries such as osteoarthritis or carpel tunnel syndrome.

The CIPD Health and Wellbeing at work survey 2021 found that the most common causes of long-term absence were:

- Mental ill health (50%)
- Musculoskeletal injuries (48%)
- Stress (48%)
- Acute medical conditions such as stroke, heart attack and cancer (45%)

Managing and treating obesity

To lose weight, you may need to change your eating habits and be more active. One way to lose weight is to start with small changes and as they build up and become a part of your lifestyle results will start to show. Here are some things that can be changed to help lose weight:

- Eat the right portion sizes
- Eat a healthier/balanced diet
- Be more active
- Read food labels and reduce consumption of items labelled in red (such as fats and sugars)

- Some individuals often need more support so trying to lose weight with someone, going to a personal training or nutritionist to have more support and guidance

The British heart foundation have a healthy living page for more tips on small changes you can make - read it **HERE.**

As an employer, you can assist employees to make better informed choices and move into sustainably healthy routines. This can include providing the following opportunities for staff:

- Assisting employees to make better informed food choices by continuously promoting healthy choices in what's offered in staff canteens, vending machines, events that involve food and any visiting food providers

- Thinking creatively about how and when people get exercise during the working day. These solutions should be practical and don't have to involve activities that require time, money or motivation:
  - Secure parking sites for bicycles, showers and changing facilities
  - Fitting offices with standing desks
  - Encouraging standing or walking meetings
  - Develop links with local sports facilities to offer subsidised memberships
  - Company sports days or active team building exercises
  - Health promotion events

You could also consider holding employee health assessments looking at weight, BMI and waist measurement, blood pressure, cholesterol, and overall body composition. These events provide education and advice, empowering employees to take control of their health.

Fact of the month

Obesity is a common problem in the UK that's estimated to affect around **1** in every **4** adults

Tip of the month

If you're planning on doing Dry January, the best thing to do is remove all the alcohol from your home

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