

# health

## What Happens to Your Body When You Stop Drinking Alcohol for a Month

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- Taking a month off alcohol can support better sleep, mood, focus, digestion, and hydration.
- You may see visible improvements in skin, reduced bloating, stabilized appetite, and potential weight loss as your body resets.
- Even short-term or partial reductions in alcohol intake can benefit your heart, liver, and metabolic health.

Many people try "Dry January" to take a break from alcohol and see how it affects their health. While the benefits of quitting alcohol can vary depending on how much you drank, research suggests the body can begin to recover quickly. Even one month without alcohol may improve sleep, mood, and focus, and may support weight loss.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. You'll Likely Feel Less Bloated and Better Hydrated

Alcohol is a diuretic, meaning it increases urine output. This can lead to mild dehydration and [electrolyte imbalances](#).<sup>2</sup> When you're dehydrated, your body may hold onto water, which can make you feel [bloated and puffy](#).

Dehydration can also slow digestion and lead to constipation, making bloating more noticeable.<sup>3</sup>

Stopping alcohol may help your body balance fluids and electrolytes, which can improve hydration and ease bloating.<sup>2</sup>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. [Alcohol and you](#).

## 2. Your Sleep Will Start to Improve—Even If It's Bumpy at First

Alcohol may [make it easier to fall asleep](#), but it can disrupt REM sleep. This can make sleep feel less restorative and may lead to lighter, more broken sleep during the second half of the night.<sup>4</sup>

Sleep also doesn't always improve right away after you stop drinking.<sup>5</sup> "In the first week or two, some people experience disrupted sleep or restlessness as their nervous system adjusts," [Justin Gurland, LMSW](#), founder of The Maze, New York City's first alcohol-free members club, told *Health*.

After the adjustment period, you may notice deeper sleep, improved morning energy, and better focus.

### 3. You Might Notice Mood Shifts and Clearer Thinking

Alcohol affects brain chemicals involved in mood, stress, and focus.<sup>6</sup> When you stop drinking, these chemicals can start to return to a more natural balance. This may lead to fewer mood swings and clearer thinking over time.

“[Alcohol is a depressant](#) and can negatively affect your brain chemistry,” [Kayla Miata, LMSW](#), program director of Health Home Care Management at CN Guidance & Counseling Services, told *Health*. “Taking a break from alcohol gives the brain and nervous system a chance to reset, which can lead to more stable moods, less stress, and fewer emotional ups and downs.”

Both Miata and Gurland note that mood changes can show up differently depending on how much and how often someone drank. Early irritability or anxiety is common, especially for people who drank heavily or used alcohol to manage stress.<sup>5</sup>

#### What counts as heavy drinking?

Heavy drinking is defined as eight or more drinks per week for women or 15 or more drinks per week for men.<sup>7</sup>

If you aren’t ready to fully quit, research suggests that “Damp January,” or cutting back on alcohol for a month, may offer similar mood benefits.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. Your Skin May Look Brighter and Your Digestion May Feel Smoother

Taking a month off alcohol may also support [healthier-looking skin](#). Alcohol can dehydrate the skin and trigger inflammation. This may lead to dry, dull-looking skin, facial puffiness, and more [noticeable fine lines](#).<sup>89</sup>

Digestive health may improve, too. Alcohol can damage the gut lining, increase [intestinal permeability](#) (sometimes called “leaky gut”), and disrupt the balance of gut bacteria. These changes can affect digestion and nutrient absorption. Alcohol can also irritate the stomach and [worsen acid reflux](#) for some people.<sup>10</sup>

According to some studies, gut health and digestion can begin to recover within a few weeks of stopping drinking.<sup>11</sup>

## 5. You Might Start Craving Sweets—and Then See Your Appetite Stabilize

Alcohol affects the brain’s reward system, which helps explain why cravings often shift after people stop drinking.<sup>6</sup>

Research suggests that alcohol and sugar trigger dopamine release, a brain chemical linked to pleasure and reward. When alcohol is removed, it’s common to crave sweets, especially during the first one to two weeks, as your brain adjusts.<sup>12</sup>

Cravings often ease over time, and your appetite may stabilize. You may also lose a few pounds by cutting out the extra calories from alcohol.<sup>13</sup>

“Alcohol provides calories without much nutritional value, and removing it can reduce overall calorie intake,” [Maryann Amirshahi, MD](#), Addiction Medicine specialist at MedStar Health, told Health. She added that people should be mindful of substitutions, noting that many mocktails and non-alcoholic drinks contain added sugars that can offset potential weight-related benefits.

## 6. Your Heart, Liver, and Metabolic Health May Begin to Improve

Taking a break from alcohol has been linked to improvements in heart, liver, and metabolic health. Studies show that a month without alcohol may help improve:<sup>1</sup>

- Blood pressure
- Insulin sensitivity
- Liver function and liver fat levels
- Blood sugar control
- Weight management

“Alcohol is a known toxin to the liver. Even a short period of sobriety gives the liver and digestive system a chance to begin repairing alcohol-related damage,” said Amirshahi.

## What to Keep in Mind When You Stop Drinking Alcohol

Experts agree that "Dry January" affects people differently depending on their drinking habits.

“Light or moderate drinkers often experience 'Dry January' more subtly,” explained Gurland. “Heavier drinkers may notice more dramatic early changes—like irritability, sleep disruption, or cravings—because alcohol has been playing a larger role in their nervous system.”

It's also important to remember that "Dry January" doesn't have to mean complete abstinence to be beneficial. Even reducing how much you drink can support your health.

“Any decrease in alcohol intake is beneficial to overall health,” said Amirshahi. “Some people may find it easier to stick with gradual reductions rather than complete abstinence. Long-term consistency and developing a healthier relationship with alcohol is often more beneficial than being perfectly sober for a single month.”

## When to Seek Care

For lighter or occasional drinkers, "Dry January" is generally safe. However, both Gurland and Amirshahi agree that people who drink heavily or daily should consider medical guidance before stopping suddenly.

“For individuals who have developed tolerance or dependence, abrupt cessation can lead to alcohol withdrawal,” Amirshahi explained. Symptoms can range from anxiety, tremors, and nausea to seizures and dangerous changes in heart rate or blood pressure.<sup>5</sup>

If you’ve experienced withdrawal symptoms before, drink most days of the week, or have underlying medical conditions, it’s safest to talk with a healthcare provider before cutting back.

[Story link: <https://www.health.com/no-alcohol-for-a-month-11879223>]