



DRY JANUARY®

“Dry January is the UK's one-month alcohol-free challenge. It isn't about giving anything up. It's about getting something back. Get your fun back. Get your energy back. Get your calm back. Get your YOU back.” Alcohol Change UK 2022

WEEK TWO

ALCOHOL AND MENTAL HEALTH
January 2022



ALCOHOL AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Relationship between alcohol and mental health is complex. Some of us use alcohol to try and help manage symptoms of anxiety and depression, but heavy drinking is likely to make those symptoms worse.

What to do if you are struggling?

If you are feeling anxious, low or experiencing any other symptoms of mental health problems, or you think that you are drinking too much, you deserve support. You can speak to your GP, and get advice and help at www.mind.org.uk and www.alcoholchange.org.uk.

Why are people affected differently by alcohol?

Alcohol can have both short-term and long-term effects on our mental health. How we're affected when we drink can differ depending on lots of factors such as what type of alcohol we're drinking, how much we drink, how long we drink for and our mental state at the time. While moderate use is not usually a problem, drinking regularly or heavily over an extended period can have a longer-term impact on our mental health.

What happens when we drink?

When we have a drink or two, we might feel more relaxed, and experience an improved mood. One reason is that when we drink alcohol, our bodies produce extra dopamine, which travels to the parts of the brain known as 'reward centres' – the bits that make us feel good and make us want to do more of whatever we're doing.

Because of these short-term effects on our mood, some of us who experience problems with our mental health may drink alcohol to try to relieve anxiety or depressive thoughts. But as well as making us produce more dopamine, alcohol is a 'depressant', meaning that it slows down brain functioning. So, as those initial calming feelings subside as we continue to drink, they are often replaced with more negative emotions, like stress, anxiety and sometimes anger. This combined with the hangover effects of heavy drinking - caused by dehydration, low blood sugar, and the various by-products of alcohol - can leave us feeling sluggish, unwell and low for a number of hours or days.

Five key ways to improve your mental health and wellbeing :

Getting active - Try exercising outdoors to give yourself an extra boost

Learning new skills - like cooking, DIY or gardening, which can help you build a sense of purpose

Spending more time with friends and family - which provides emotional support

Giving to others - for example by volunteering your time or skills

Practicing Mindfulness - This can help us relax more.