

WELLBEING

Dry January 2020



Research from Alcohol Change UK has found that 88% of Dry January 2019 participants saved money and 58% of them lost weight.

As the New Year arrives, we all become gradually inundated with news outlets reporting the return of the 'January Blues' and what resolutions we should commit to.

One of the most popular lifestyle campaigns that arrives in the New Year is Dry January - the event that encourages us to put down the bottle and commit to turning January into an alcohol-free month.

The campaign was introduced in 2013 by Alcohol Change UK - a leading UK alcohol charity and grows larger and larger each year. Last year, over 4 million people took part in the wellbeing event.

Why take part in Dry January?

It's no secret that alcohol plays a significant role in our lives and culture. Many of us drink to celebrate, socialise and relax. However, there is a significant proportion of the UK and Irish population who have an unhealthy, and at times fatal, relationship with alcohol.

According to the latest figures, the number of alcohol-related deaths in the UK is at its highest level since records

began, and alcohol is now responsible for 88 deaths every month in Ireland.

As a result, Alcohol Change UK are encouraging us all to think about our relationship with alcohol by taking a 31-day break from the booze.

Health benefits of Dry January

Improved sleeping habits: According to research, 71% of Dry January participants confirmed they had improved sleep. Alcohol can exacerbate certain sleep conditions like snoring, and without it, you can increase the quality of your sleep, thus making you more energetic and active.

Financial savings: The average person spends £50,000 / €58,300 on alcohol in their lifetime. To see how much money you can save during Dry January, put aside the amount you would spend on alcohol each week. You may be surprised at the end of the month!

Weight loss: Considering a pint of beer contains 215 calories, and a glass of wine includes 126, giving up on alcohol for 4 weeks can make a noticeable impact on your weight.

Mental health: Regular alcohol consumption decreases the levels of the brain chemical serotonin - a key chemical in depression. By avoiding alcohol, your serotonin levels will increase and help regulate your mood.

Not only will you see the above benefits during your month-long detox, but research conducted by the University of Sussex has found that Dry January participants remain drinking less even six months after Dry January.

Relationship with alcohol

Once Dry January is over, we recommend that you spend some time to reflect on what you have achieved during the experience.

Ask yourself; how do you feel? Have you lost weight? Do you sleep better? Do you feel more productive during the day? How much money have you saved? The answers to these questions will be vital takeaways to consider after you finish your experiment.

Remember, your tolerance to the effects of alcohol will likely be much lower after your month-long detox, so be careful not to overdo it the first time you choose to drink again.

Overall, taking a 31-day break from your drinking habits will provide numerous health and wellbeing benefits in the short-term. However, you will reap the most health benefits if you use Dry January as a springboard to evaluate your usual drinking habits and overall relationship with alcohol.

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TOPICAL

Blue Monday – fact or fiction?

20th January 2020



As we approach the New Year, it's important for employees and employers alike to be made aware of the facts (and fiction) that surround the 'Blue Monday'.

What is Blue Monday?

Blue Monday is a name given to a day in January (typically the third Monday of the month) claimed to be the most depressing day of the year. Psychologist Cliff Arnall, while conducting research for former UK holiday company, Sky Travel, coined the concept in 2004.

To lead him to his conclusion, Arnall developed a formula that considered many aspects of the new year that can affect the typical employee's mental health, including; weather, debt, monthly salary, time passed since Christmas, non-fulfilled New Year resolutions and low motivational levels.

Is Blue Monday real?

January is often considered the most depressing month of year. In fact, research conducted by iReach Insights found that 56% of people in Ireland believe that January is the most depressing month, and that 51% of people under the age of 34 feel low and deflated following Christmas.

It's easy to believe why people think January is the most depressing month in the calendar. The days are shorter, the weather is cold and wet and many of us have already given up on our New Year resolutions. However, there are strong arguments against the idea of Blue Monday as well...

The concept of Blue Monday has since been disregarded and considered as pseudoscience by many experts. They believe that while the initial formula behind the concept had merit, it has since taken on a new life as a means for travel companies to sell summer holidays during the slow winter months through the use of marketing and PR.

Combating Blue Monday

While there is evidence to suggest that Blue Monday is simply a marketing ploy, it's important not to completely disregard Arnall's theory and the mental health effects that the winter months can bring.

Below we have listed several tips on how to combat the effects of the January blues and the best ways to protect your general wellbeing in the New Year.

1. **Sunlight** - Natural light helps stabilise serotonin and triggers endorphins, both mood-boosting hormones. Try to get outside as much as you can during the day to give your wellbeing a positive boost.
2. **Exercise** - Steady exercise such as walking, swimming and cycling will boost endorphins, and will leave you feeling calmer and happier.

3. **Be sociable** - The biggest mistake people can make is to shut themselves off from the rest of the world until February. The need to hibernate may be financially motivated but being sociable does not have to cost money. You could host game and movie nights for your friends or even Skype your loved ones regularly.

4. **Set achievable targets** - If your New Year's resolutions are losing their appeal by mid-January, why not set yourself a completely unrelated mini goal to achieve on Blue Monday? It could be as simple as a DIY project or de-cluttering a space in your home. You'll end the day with a sense of achievement and you just might remember why you set those bigger, long-term resolutions on New Year's Eve.

While the legitimacy of Blue Monday is often debated this time of year, there is no doubting the mental health effects of the winter months. Therefore it is vital that you make an effort to protect your wellbeing.

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LEGAL

Adoption and surrogacy leave – parents' rights



Many intended parents embark on the journey of adoption and surrogacy for various personal reasons. Balancing the needs of work and family life is particularly important when becoming a new parent and employees should be aware of their legal rights in the workplace.

In England and Wales, Adoption is defined as a legal process whereby parental responsibility for a child is transferred over from the birth parent or other person with parental responsibility to their adopter. Surrogacy is a mutual arrangement between two parties, often supported by a legal document confirming a woman agrees to carry a child on behalf of another who is or will become the parent(s) of the child.

Statutory adoption leave

Statutory adoption leave enables an intended parent to up to take 52 weeks of leave, regardless of their length of service. This consists of 26 weeks of ordinary adoption leave and 26 weeks of additional adoption leave. Only one parent can take statutory adoption leave, referred to as the 'main adopter' in this article, the other parent may be eligible for paternity and/or shared parental leave.

Eligibility

To become eligible for statutory adoption leave, the main adopter must be an employee, give the correct notice and give

proof of the adoption or surrogacy if required by the employer.

Starting adoption leave

Statutory adoption leave can start either from the date of the child's placement or on any date up to 14 days before the expected date of placement. If the main adopter wishes to change the start date of adoption leave, the employer must be informed with the correct notice, of at least 28 days, before the start date given in the original notice.

The main adopter can take paid time off before the adoption placement to attend up to five adoption appointments, for a maximum of 6.5 hours per appointment. If a couple have been jointly approved for adoption, the other parent is entitled to take unpaid time off to attend up to two appointments. An employer can request proof of the appointment date and times.

Adoption leave ending

In the event that the child's placement unexpectedly comes to end during adoption leave, employees do have options in regards to their return to the workplace. In the following circumstances, the main adopter can choose to either return to work, or remain on adoption leave for up to eight weeks after the end of the week in which the placement ended; the child passes away during the adoption leave, the child is returned to the adoption agency, or, the adoption agency informs that the placement will not occur during the course of the adoption leave.

Statutory adoption pay

Statutory adoption pay is paid to the main adopter for up to 39 weeks. For the first six weeks, the weekly pay amount is 90% of average weekly earnings. Following this and

for the remaining 33 weeks, the weekly pay amount is currently £148.68 or 90% of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

To qualify for statutory adoption pay, the main adopter must have been continuously employed for at least 26 weeks, by the week matched with a child, earn on average at least the £118 per week (for 2019/20) and give correct notice and proof of the adoption.

Surrogacy

Surrogate mother's remain the legal mother of the child throughout pregnancy, until the legal rights are transferred to the intended parents after birth. Surrogate mother's therefore have the same rights as pregnant employees, which entitles them up to 52 weeks maternity leave.

For intended parents of a surrogacy arrangement, to become the legal parents of the child, an application for a Parental Order or Adoption Order must be made after the birth.

Annual leave and parental leave may also be available as options to consider to extend leave after becoming a new parent. See further information on [ACAS](#) regarding parental leave eligibility and rights.

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