Dry January Could Aid in Liver Regeneration

One alcohol-free month can help lower one's risk for liver damage and reset one's relationship with alcohol.

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Many people partake in Dry January, the increasingly popular postholiday challenge that calls for folks to forgo alcohol for a month. Dry January has a number of health benefits, including reducing liver inflammation, according to MD Anderson Cancer Center.

It is well known that excessive alcohol use can have negative immediate and long-term effects. It is associated with several chronic illnesses, including heart disease, cancer and early death.

Alcohol has been linked to increased risk for breast, oral, throat, colorectal, esophageal and liver cancer, according to MD Anderson. In fact, last week Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, released a new Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol and Cancer Risk outlining the direct link between alcohol consumption and increased cancer risk.

Alcohol use is also associated with liver damage, particularly alcohol-related liver disease.

The liver performs more than 500 functions, including processing what the body needs and discarding what it doesn't, including alcohol. If there is too much alcohol, the liver can't process it, which increases the risk for liver damage. Over time, that damage can become serious, which can lead to cirrhosis, or scarring of the liver, liver disease, hepatitis, liver cancer and more.

Dry January offers the body a month to regenerate.

"Usually, within 30 days, the liver can regenerate, or reproduce, cells that had been injured or died," Maher Karam-Hage, MD, a psychiatrist who specializes in addictions, told MD Anderson. "When you continue to injure your liver by continuing to drink alcohol, fibers form, and the liver

cannot regenerate.”

The backbone of treatment for alcohol-relate liver disease is abstinence from alcohol. In addition to stopping alcohol, nutritional support and medication may be prescribed.

Dry January can provide an accessible jumping-off point for someone wanting to reduce their alcohol intake. The challenge can also help reset one’s relationship with alcohol. In fact, one study found that people who resume drinking after Dry January drink less than they did before.

About 178,000 people in the United States die as a result of excessive alcohol use each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). What’s more, alcohol-related deaths in the United States have doubled over the last two decades.

The National Institutes of Health defines heavy alcohol use as:

- For men, consuming 5 or more drinks on any day or 15 or more drinks per week;
- For women, consuming 4 or more drinks on any day or 8 or more drinks per week.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Helpline is a free confidential treatment referral and information service for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. The service is available 24 hours a day year-round in both English and Spanish.

For more, click #Alcohol. There, you’ll find headlines such as "Risks of Excessive Drinking During the Holiday Season,“ ”Moderate Alcohol Consumption Fuels Liver Disease Progression in People With MASLD“ and ”Beer-Only Drinkers’ Diets are Worse Than Wine Drinkers."

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