

I tried to go without alcohol for a month – and I only made it 10 days



I didn't exactly succeed at this challenge.

- I tried to give up drinking for a month.
- But this proved to be more difficult than I thought it would be.
- I only lasted 10 days in a row without drinking.
- It showed me how I tend to rely on alcohol to soothe me.

The start of a new year usually means resolutions, and with the promise of a clean slate, for some, comes the promise to

be alcohol-free for the month of January.

This trend, known as “Dry January,” is fairly common, with [3.1 million people in the UK](#) claiming they’ll try it in 2018, according to the Independent. The University of Sussex reported that in 2015, 82 percent of [Dry January participants in the UK felt a sense of achievement](#), [79 percent saved money](#), [62 percent had better sleep and more energy](#), and [49 percent lost weight](#).

At first, I planned to spend the last month of 2017 alcohol-free out of necessity, really. In late November I found out I was pregnant, and immediately said goodbye to even the occasional cocktail, a glass of wine, or bottle of beer.

Then, I miscarried. My incentive to cease drinking was gone and, if anything, I felt a palpable need to find the nearest bar as quickly as possible. Sad, in pain, and struggling, having now experienced my third miscarriage in two years, I quickly threw my plan to avoid alcohol out the proverbial window.

But then, I decided to try and continue December without alcohol.

After I enjoyed a few alcoholic beverages, I once again decided I would try to spend the rest of the month of December alcohol-free. In the moment, it felt like the right thing to do. I had given myself permission to “break” my promise – a form of self-care, I internally argued – and now I was going

to get back on that figurative horse and carry out my plan. I didn't have control over how my body responded to a very wanted pregnancy, but I could control whether or not I continued to drink for the month of December. That I had a say in, and in a way, I was hoping that controlling my alcohol intake could make me feel like I had control of my body again.

I grew up in a small town outside of Anchorage, Alaska, where alcohol and drug use were (and remain) prevalent. I had my first drink when I was 12 years old, and have casually consumed alcohol ever since. [Alaska's alcohol mortality rate is three times the national average](#), and as a born and raised Alaskan, I have lost friends to drunk driving, suicide while consuming alcohol, alcohol poisoning, and gun violence when alcohol was being consumed. In other words, I have more than a few reasons to give up drinking, if only in remembrance of my friends.



And, sometimes, I will “take a break” and avoid alcohol for a week or so. But for the most part, alcohol has been a normal part of my life. A way to “relax” after a long day’s work, a particularly trying news cycle, or a frustrating day as a parent. It’s been there when I had a raise, reached a career goal, or ushered in another birthday, and it was there when I attended wakes and funerals and said goodbye to friends moving to other countries. It was even there after my son was born: I gifted our team of nurses and doctors miniature bottles of vodka; red ribbons tied to the necks and cards thanking them for their care. That gift, by the way, was a hit.

And, perhaps, that’s what my month of trying to give up alcohol has made me acutely aware of. Whether I’ve noticed it or not, I have come to rely on alcohol for every significant, and sometimes not-so-significant, part of my life.

I failed in my quest to avoid alcohol almost immediately.

I lasted only four days, from that first post-miscarriage drink, before I had another drink. This time it was at a company Christmas party, so I chalked it up to typical holiday celebrations and the need to feel carefree with my coworkers. It had been a difficult year, after all, and we were all looking for a bit of reprieve. "This doesn't really count," I silently told myself as I ordered two jack and cokes the moment I arrived at the party.

And I continued to assure myself that this was an asterisk on my alcohol-free month. "You deserve this," I told myself. "This is allowed."

I didn't feel the way the following day, though, when my hangover was significant. I had to work and to parent my child, so I felt foolish for indulging, especially during a month I had vowed to abstain from alcohol entirely. But again, I assured myself that a holiday party didn't count. Everyone drinks with their coworkers at those things, right?

Not all struggles with alcohol look the same.

According to a study from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, almost [30% of Americans say they've had enough trouble with drinking](#) to qualify as having an alcohol

use disorder at some point of their lives. Among the symptoms of alcohol use disorder include “a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control alcohol use, recurrent alcohol use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home, and a craving or strong desire or urge to use alcohol.”

Now, [one in eight American adults meet diagnostic criteria](#) for alcohol use as a disorder. What one envisions when “alcohol use disorder” is discussed is not always indicative of a true disorder, either. A person doesn’t have to lose their job, fail to pay their bills, or end up homeless in order to suffer from an alcohol use disorder. And in a country that, if anything, encourages alcohol consumption, it’s easy to blur the line between casual use and potentially harmful consumption habits.

I have a decent career, a son I care for to the best of my ability and have never lost a job due to excessive alcohol use. I’m pretty punctual, responsible, and reliable. I pay my bills on time. In other words, my life isn’t negatively impacted by my choice to consume alcohol. But I have tried to cut down on drinking before, to no avail, and at difficult points in my life – after a sexual assault, a miscarriage, a death in my family or friend group – I have turned to alcohol as a way to cope. I have a drink after work and claim it’s to “relax.” I’ll drink heavily with friends after a long absence and call it a “celebration.”



After my company Christmas party, I didn't bother trying to keep myself from drinking the occasional beverage after work. In fact, for the entire month of December, the longest I went without a drink of alcohol was 10 days. I guess, in the end, I was tired and disheartened. I drank a glass of wine or two almost every day for the rest of the year and had more than a few drinks on New Year's Eve. I told myself that I had been through enough, and to keep myself to a promise I made when I was pregnant wasn't fair to me. But now that December is over, and I'm forced to examine my failure to remain alcohol-free, I have realized that continuing to drink wasn't helpful. It was hurtful. And, perhaps, that choice is indicative of a greater problem that I need to face.

According to AFMC, a non-profit healthcare organization, "[alcohol is a depressant that only makes you more](#)

[depressed](#) and increases the number of times you have episodes of severe depression.” At a time when I was struggling with another pregnancy loss, battling Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and already at-risk for depression and anxiety, alcohol was the last thing I needed. And yet, that’s exactly what I turned to.

But my failure showed me that it’s important to take a long hard look at my alcohol use.

So while my December of alcohol-free drinking was a failure in the literal sense, I consider it a success for a variety of reasons. Failing to abstain from drinking after I endured another pregnancy loss forced me to realize how often I have relied on alcohol to get me through a difficult time. It has made me face all the moments when I’ve excused my tendency to imbibe. It has made me come to terms with my alcohol use, and how it is, perhaps, negatively affecting my life and the lives of those around me.

It’s a new month, in a new year, and I’ve made another promise to go 30 days without consuming any alcohol. I will take it one day at a time, and I will remember what the previous month taught me about healthy coping habits, depression, and true self-care. So in the end, I didn’t fail. I just realized that continuing to drink the way I do now isn’t a way to succeed.

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