



HOW IMPORTANT WAS DRY JANUARY?

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As Dry January reaches its end, Lecturer in Post-registration Health Care at the University of Derby Gerri Mortimore is asking; is alcohol really all that bad?



Many of us who regularly consume alcohol don't really think about the units we drink unless we are contemplating driving. I think many people will be shocked to realise

that they are drinking many more units than is recommended by the Department of Health. In 2016, it stated that there was no real safe level of drinking but as a guide, both men and women should only drink a maximum of 14 units a week. Previous to this it was 14 units for females and 21 units for males.

What is an alcohol unit?

Alcohol units have been around for over 30 years, but how many of us really know what a unit of alcohol is?

One Unit of Alcohol =	
Wine 8.5%	125ml
Beer/cider 3.5%	½ pint
Extra strong beer or cider	¼ pint
Spirits 40%	25ml
Sherry or port 20%	50ml

Table 1: one alcohol unit equivalents.

If you take wine, for example, one unit is equivalent to 125mls (small glass) of 8.5% alcohol by volume (ABV) wine. When units were originally devised, the wine was based on an 8.5% ABV. Most pubs, only sell wine in 175ml or 250ml glasses and most wines are between 11-15% (ABV).

To work out the unit content of a 250ml glass of 15% wine you multiply the volume 250ml by 15% ABV and divide by 1000, which equals 3.73 units. This one glass of wine could quite easily take you over the drink drive limit.

I recently hosted a [Dry January](#) event at the University and gave a demonstration where I poured an 'average' glass of wine for myself, in the same way many of us do on an evening. This so called average glass of 15% red wine measured in at 330mls. After calculating the units (330 x 15 divided by 1000) it worked out to be 4.95 units.

It made the audience, and I, think. Many of us there, myself included, would have thought my glass of wine was around 2 units. However, if I consumed a glass like this every night, it would equate to 35 units per week, which is two and a half times the recommended weekly allowance for females. In 10 to 15 years drinking at this level I could quite easily develop alcohol related liver damage. Do I have an alcohol problem? The answer is no. Could I develop liver disease? The answer is yes. Scary thought, isn't it?

The same logic applies to drinking spirits. Do people who drink spirits at home carefully measure out 25mls into glass? Not always. When I demonstrating pouring a 25ml measure into a gin glass, it only covered the bottom of the glass. However, when I poured myself a 'home' measure and accurately measured it afterwards, it equated to around 4.5 units. Just two home poured glasses of gin (or any 40% ABV spirit) would be considered a binge.

Drinking definitions	
Sensible drinking	A weekly intake of 14 units
Binge drinking	The consumption of 7 or more units in a single session
Hazardous drinking	An alcohol intake likely to increase the risk of developing alcohol related harm (22 – 35)
Harmful drinking	Alcohol consumption causing health problems directly related to alcohol

Table 2: Drinking definitions

Will I develop liver disease?

Not everyone who drinks 35 units or more a week will develop alcohol related liver disease. A lot depends on your weight, muscle mass and gender. Just because your friends or relatives drink a lot and are okay, doesn't mean to say that you will be. If you are someone who consumes alcohol regularly, start measuring the amount you drink as it may just make you aware of how many units you are consuming and this may help you to reduce it.

Many of us acknowledged that over the festive period we drank too much alcohol and ate too much, and so took on the challenge of Dry January. January may be over, but it's not too late to give up or cut back on your alcohol intake and do your liver the world of good. Unlike other organs, the liver can regenerate and, by having alcohol free days, this can help your liver a lot. Furthermore, an interesting experiment would be to cost up the money saved during your alcohol free time. You could even use this money to donate to the [British Liver Trust](#).

How did you find Dry January? Do you know people who took part? Let us know on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [LinkedIn](#).