



# Common side effects of not drinking

By rejecting alcohol, you reject something very human, an extra limb that we have collectively grown to deal with reality and with each other. Getting around without it is not painless



Karolina Kozmana · [Follow](#)

10 min read · Jan 21, 2024



--



1109



Do you know one of those annoying people? They decline the dessert not because they're on a diet, but because sweet stuff doesn't do anything for them. *Oh really!* you say, *Good for you!* when what you really think is *Fuck off.*

Well, I'm that person, but with alcohol. I'm here to tell you, it's as *good for me*, as it is hard for me. So, in case your dry January is going well and you think of extending it, read on.



Me on a wedding in 2022 vs in 2023. The reality on the right is less vibrant

Over a year ago, someone shared with me this informative, factual, yet thoroughly bleak [podcast by Andrew Huberman](#) about the effects of any amount of alcohol on your brain and body. Since I had just reached the wise age of thirty, otherwise known as the age when you have less fucks to give, I asked myself why I drank at all and what would happen if I stopped. And then I stopped.

You know how it goes from there. I felt great, I saved money, 'I often regretted drinking but I never regretted not drinking' and so on. It's all

true.

However, before that, since the first glass of wine that my parents gave me at 12, for the good 18 years of my life, I did regularly drink. Why?

Because that's what people do.

So, let's start by saying that when you stop drinking, people don't know what to do with you.

## **The side effects of being sober**

### **1) People**

#### **People will ask you why you don't drink.**

They react well if you respond honestly. They don't react well if you reverse the question in return. Pro tip: you can do that if you don't want them to speak to you for the rest of the party.

#### **People will ask you for permission to drink.**

*Oh you don't? Good for you! Would you mind if I had a beer though?*

Why would I?! I've just explained it's not because of a past addiction or an alcoholic parent. The only reason I see for this persistent question is...

#### **People will think you are judging them.**

If you're sober not because of a problem, then it must be because you feel superior this way. *I choose not to drink* means *I understand the implications of alcohol on my behaviour tonight and on my health in the long term*, means *I'm a responsible and mature person and you, in turn, are an idiot*. That's how many drinkers will see you.

If we're not all in this together, people's choices reveal themselves as choices and not as a default. Consequently, they think that you are judging them, when in reality they are faced with the need to evaluate their own behaviour for the first time.

### **People will stop inviting you to stuff.**

They think it's because you won't enjoy yourself in a drinking crowd, so it's best to protect you from boredom. You think it's because they won't enjoy your boring presence and want to protect themselves from your judgement.

### **People will think you are less fun.**

These last two points create a vicious circle. Or rather, a spiral of social exclusion for sober people. This — is how you lose friends.

Sorry, maybe I should've started off with that.

When you go sober, you will lose friends.

## **2) Friends**

Will split into two groups. Those who will find ways to spend time with you without alcohol and those who will keep pressuring you. The second group will split into two groups. Those who stop seeing you and those who start drinking less, because being with you made them realise their own drinking behaviour.

Whether you like it or not, you will have an impact on your friends. Your choice will not come unnoticed, it will create ripples in your friends' group, precisely because it's a choice and not the default, and one that rejects the fundamental way in which people connect.

Each of the people that used to drink with you will now be faced with a

new way of relating to a friend. They may or may not like their own sober interpretation of friendship.

My transition to alcohol-free socialising was easy because it coincided with moving to a new city. I simply made friends who were okay with me not drinking. Hence... I have two friends.

When I lived in London, I used to hang out with a big group of people. Now when I come to visit, I see a couple of them, maybe a handful. I've realised that all the others were my party friends. To put it bluntly, I now see that I cannot stand them without alcohol.

Sorry, maybe I should've added that.

When you lose friends, it's because you'll realise that without alcohol, they don't have much in common with you.

That is, the new you.

### **3) You**

#### **You'll behave differently.**

Of course you will: you'll have removed a substance that influenced, even dictated your behaviour in many contexts and now you'll have to figure out what to do by yourself.

More than that, you'll have to face your sober personality, always. You'll love the weight loss, the energy, the deep sleep, but this — this you may not love.

You may, indeed, be less fun than you thought.

### **You'll drink a lot of sparkling water.**

This will be the ultimate fallback in any bar, restaurant or house party, unless you quit alcohol to get diabetes from Sprite and Fanta instead. Coke Zero is your other new friend, but not for the whole night, because chances are that if you've been sensitive to the effects of alcohol, you're sensitive to caffeine as well. And if you're so caffeine insensitive that you can drink Coke Zero the whole night, then you have a different problem, because...

### **You'll get tired.**

I know you're determined to prove everyone that you're not less fun without alcohol, but they can see you yawn. Yes, it's obvious with your mouth closed, too. You're now the friend who asks if we can start at 7:30 instead of 8pm (it would be 7, if it was up to you). You need a little pick me up, it seems.

### **You'll substitute for other substances.**

Depending on your caffeine tolerance, Coke Zero either leaves you jittery or has no effect whatsoever. Unenthusiastically sipping your sparkling water,

you will long to change your consciousness, somehow. To hold and taste the essence of a party, the embodiment of fun.

That's how I started liking cigarettes, and would probably be a social smoker now if my doctor didn't categorically forbid it. That's how I also experimented with weed at parties, only to find out it's a substance I

should enjoy in solitude, unless people are okay to speak to me without expecting a response.

It's either sparkling water or jittery Coke Zero for me. If I choose the first one, I don't stay awake, if I choose the other one, I don't chill out.

### **You'll get stressed.**

It's only half bad when you notice the small stuff. That tall people have zero spatial awareness in clubs. That your partner transitions from charming to embarrassing at a house party. That your boss tells sexist jokes at team dinners. Only half bad.

It's all bad when you decide to host a party yourself. Either you'll be eaten up by doubts if everyone is having a good time, or you'll lose touch with your thoroughly drunk guests and you'll want to find ways to get them the fuck out of your house. That's only all bad, the hosting.

What's double bad is a family occasion, sober. Triple bad if you're single.

### **You'll spend the saved money on therapy.**

You think you're coming from a healthy and functional family — but have you ever tried spending Christmas, birthdays, weddings, christenings or funerals with them, without alcohol? Right, as a teenager. A period when we all appreciated how great our families were and loved spending time with them.

You'll need therapy after bottling up your feelings and awaken traumas. Because you'd sooner drop dead at the family table than pick up a fight.

### **You'll have less courage.**

Unless you're fortunate to dance on the bar table, steal pitchers and hit on strangers comfortably by nature, you'll have less "crazy stories" to tell.

And if you're dating, you'll need to quickly learn how to break ice without a cocktail.

The first time I missed alcohol after quitting was when I arrived to the first date with my now boyfriend. What he took for a lack of interest was just me being intimidated by him (story) and wishing that my green tea would turn into wine. As it didn't, the other option was to say *We should head somewhere gesellig, preferably to yours*. When you don't have the Dutch courage, you'll have to build your own.

### **You'll be difficult to date.**

*Should we get a drink soon?* It's the easiest, most straightforward and casual way to offer a first date. Since you both got so far, you don't want to spoil it by explaining that you don't drink. Finding an activity is complicated, a dinner is serious and a coffee is prude. You want to come across as carefree and fun, not difficult and boring.

So you meet in a bar, and for the longest time you're trying not to draw attention to your beverage choices. You may even say that you just don't feel like drinking today... technically it's not a lie.

### **You'll be less honest.**

Besides preventing you from either chilling out or making irresponsible choices, your sober inhibitions will also stop you from having a heart to heart with whomever you'd otherwise do shots with.

On the plus side, your secrets are guarded and your resentments can safely grow forever. On a sad note, you won't get a free voucher to get emotional with your friends, especially if you're a man in our toxic masculinity, no-homo culture.



I once had a crush on my friend and suspected it was mutual. *You two just need to get drunk together and talk honestly*, advised my boyfriend. Wise, except neither she nor I drink. As a result, we'll probably go to the grave wondering: is she into me? (Really can't tell).

### **You'll lie.**

Not only because you'll be less honest, less courageous, less spontaneous and less chilled. Mostly because you'll be fed up. With restaurants that try to sell you wine, with bars that "run out" of tea. With people that over and over ask you why, doubt you, pressure you and even trick you. You'll discover one privilege carried with having a vagina in our society: you'll shut them up with a simple *I'm pregnant*. That's after you discover that "I'm muslim" doesn't work.

### **You'll be horrified.**

Because really, people don't give up. For many of them, it's a badge of honour to make you drink and if they can't, they stop being your friend.

Every time you'll have to decline a drink you'll notice that the other person is indeed drinking, and you'll notice how often that is. Far from judging them, you'll judge our reality itself. People are just doing what's agreed upon as normal.

It's normal to regularly, if not constantly, make ourselves happier by distorting the reality.

It's collectively agreed upon to ingest poison.

It's not normal, it's actually really difficult to *opt out* of ingesting poison. You have to execute a conscious choice and a good deal of strong will to exist in our society *without* ingesting poison.

What does that say about our reality?

This flip of perspective won't just be sobering, it'll be horrifying.

**You'll give in.**

Eventually, you'll do it.

You'll pour some red wine for both of you, just so he knows you'd like him to sit on the couch and kiss you.

You'll get a shot of tequila, so that your boss trusts you enough to explain the politics of the promotion cycle.

You'll sip the beer so that your mate — a good guy, bless him, but a bit stubborn — stops putting beers in front of you and complaining that they're getting warm.

And you will feel exactly as my friend described it:

You don't drink because alcohol *doesn't do it for you*. It doesn't hide the pains of our reality, not successfully.

#### **4) Warning: the reality may appear undistorted**

When people are asked why they choose to be sober, most often they reply that it's because of the hangover. Arguably, for us the hangover is not worth it.

And sure, a headache is not fun. But an emotional hangover is much more than that.

It's a sudden realisation that the reality is not as pleasant without alcohol as it is with alcohol.

It sucks. We can't handle it.

Instead, we set our expectations nice and low by default. We experience the reality of being human in its raw form, without distortion: being stressed, tired, uptight, cowardly, closed up, dishonest and condescending.

It sucks too, but for us, this honesty is easier to handle in small doses on an every day basis, than suddenly in the morning after.

~

Alcohol exists for a reason. When you quit alcohol, you'll face that reason constantly, but you'll get used to it. As little fun as it is, you'll learn how to live with pain — the pain of existence.

When you drink, you still face that same reason, but you're able to get distracted from it for a few blissful moments.

As long as you notice that both are a choice rather than take drinking as a default — *Good for you!* Enjoy responsibly. Choose your side effects.

Alcohol

Sober Living

Dry January

Social Pressure

Friendship



**Written by Karolina Kozmana**

5.5K Followers

A cultural anthropologist looking at Amsterdam and London

---

Follow

