

CLARITY GUIDES

In a world full of disinformation, get **Clarity**.

A MONTH OFF · THE EVIDENCE · SCOTLAND

Dry January & Sober Curious

A practical month plan, the myths checked,
alcohol-free drinks explained, and where to get support

◆ **FREE** guide · 31-day plan and tracker inside

FREE



WELCOME

About this guide

Every January, millions of people in the UK take a month off alcohol. Some want a reset after the festive season; some want to sleep better or save money; some are curious about what life feels like without drinking.

This guide gives you a practical plan for the month, the evidence on what a break can and can't do, honest answers to the common myths, and a guide to alcohol-free drinks. It also covers what happens next, whether that's drinking less, carrying on, or exploring the "sober curious" idea.

There's no judgement here. Whatever your reasons, we hope this helps.

How to use this guide

- 1 Chapters 1 to 3.** Why a month off, what the evidence says, and staying safe.

- 2 Chapters 4 to 6.** Units and guidelines, myths checked, and alcohol in Scotland.
- 3 Chapters 7 to 11.** Your month plan, social situations, alcohol-free drinks, recipes and tracking.
- 4 Chapters 12 to 15.** After January, sober curious, supporting others, and your workbook.
- 5 Chapters 16 to 23.** Cravings, evening routines, money, wellbeing, daily prompts, a pause, quick answers and weekly check-ins.

IN A WORLD FULL OF DISINFORMATION, GET CLARITY

Every fact, figure and phone number in this guide was checked against an official or original source in October 2026, and the sources are listed at the back. Where we could not confirm something, we say so or leave it out. Some chapters mention using everyday AI tools like Grok to help with a task; always check what they tell you against an official source.

PLEASE NOTE

This guide is general information, not medical advice. **If you drink heavily or every day, don't stop suddenly: speak to your GP first**, because withdrawal can be dangerous (see chapter 3). If you're pregnant, taking medication or have a health condition, check with a health professional.

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CHAPTER ONE · START HERE

Why take a month off?

A month without alcohol is a chance to notice how drinking fits into your life, and how you feel without it. You're in good company.

What the evidence says

- **Record numbers.** Polling for Alcohol Change UK found that 32% of UK adults, about 17.5 million people, planned an alcohol-free January in 2026.¹

Common reasons people give

Health

Feeling fitter, sleeping better, giving the body a break.

Money

Drinks add up, especially in pubs and restaurants.

Curiosity

“Do I actually need a drink to relax or socialise?”

A reset

After a heavy December, a fresh start.

Why are you doing it?

Write your own reasons. You'll look back at this on tough days.

02

CHAPTER TWO · THE EVIDENCE

What a month off can do

There's good research on what happens when regular drinkers take a break. Here's what it shows, and what it doesn't.

What the evidence says

- **Measurable changes in a month.** In a 2018 study published in *BMJ Open*, 94 moderate-to-heavy drinkers stopped drinking for a month and 47 carried on. Those who stopped had, on average, lower insulin resistance (down 25.9%), lower blood pressure (systolic down 6.6%), and lower weight (down 1.5%), plus falls in two cancer-related growth factors. There were no significant changes in the group that kept drinking. It was an observational study, so participants chose which group to join.³
- **Longer-term effects.** Alcohol Change UK reports that people who use its app and support are more likely to complete the month, and that in its surveys about 70% said they were drinking less six months later. A 2026 study found that hazardous drinkers who took part officially had lower drinking scores six months on.^{2,14}

What a month won't do

- It won't "cancel out" heavy drinking for the rest of the year.
- It isn't a treatment for alcohol dependence.
- Benefits fade if drinking goes straight back to previous levels.

CLARITY TIP

Think of the month as an experiment: what do you notice about sleep, mood, energy and money?

03

CHAPTER THREE · SAFETY

Stay safe: who should not stop suddenly

For most people, stopping for a month is safe. But for people who are physically dependent on alcohol, stopping suddenly can be dangerous.

WATCH OUT

Speak to your GP before stopping if you drink heavily or every day, or if you get shaky, sweaty or anxious when you haven't had a drink. These can be signs of withdrawal. Get medical help for shaking, sweating, anxiety, nausea or vomiting. **Call 999** for hallucinations, severe tremors, confusion or seizures (fits).⁹

Who else should take advice first?

- People taking medication that interacts with alcohol, or with a health condition.
- Anyone who has had withdrawal symptoms before.
- Anyone who is worried about their drinking.

Free support in Scotland

SERVICE	CONTACT	HOURS
Drinkline Scotland	0800 7314 314	Mon-Fri 9am-8pm; Sat-Sun 11am-4pm
Alcoholics Anonymous	0800 9177 650	National helpline
Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs	08080 10 10 11	Mon-Fri 9am-11pm
With You (online chat)	wearewithyou.org.uk	Mon-Fri 9am-9pm; Sat-Sun 10am-4pm
NHS 24	111	24 hours

Source: NHS inform, updated October 2026.¹⁰

04

CHAPTER FOUR · UNITS

Units and the guidelines

Knowing what you usually drink helps you notice the change, and plan what comes after January.

The UK guideline

The UK Chief Medical Officers advise that, to keep health risks low, it's safest not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis, spread over three or more days, with several drink-free days.⁷

What is a unit?

One unit is 10ml (8g) of pure alcohol. To work out units: strength (ABV %) × volume (ml) ÷ 1,000.⁸

DRINK	UNITS (APPROX.)
Pint of 4% beer or cider	2.3
Pint of 5.2% lager	3.0

DRINK	UNITS (APPROX.)
175ml glass of 13% wine	2.3
250ml glass of 13% wine	3.3
750ml bottle of 13% wine	9.8
25ml measure of 40% spirit	1.0
330ml bottle of 5% beer	1.7

Figures calculated by Clarity Guides with the NHS formula, rounded to one decimal place.

My usual week

DAY	WHAT I USUALLY DRINK	UNITS

05

CHAPTER FIVE · MYTHS

Myths checked

Lots of things people believe about alcohol aren't supported by the evidence.

MYTH: "A GLASS OF RED WINE A DAY IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEART."

Not supported. A 2023 review of 107 studies with nearly 4.8 million people found that, once study design problems were taken into account, low-volume drinkers did not live longer than lifelong non-drinkers. Older studies often compared drinkers with "non-drinkers" who included people who'd stopped because of ill health.⁴

MYTH: "THERE'S A SAFE LEVEL OF DRINKING."

No safe level has been found. The World Health Organization said in 2023 that no safe amount of alcohol has been identified for health, including cancer risk.⁵

MYTH: "ALCOHOL ONLY CAUSES LIVER PROBLEMS."

False. Cancer Research UK says alcohol causes seven types of cancer: breast, bowel, mouth, upper throat (pharynx), voice box (larynx), oesophagus and liver.⁶

MYTH: "A DETOX TEA WILL CLEAN OUT MY SYSTEM."

No good evidence. Your liver and kidneys deal with alcohol and other waste. There's no good evidence that detox teas or supplements speed this up, and some contain laxatives.

**MYTH: "COFFEE OR A COLD SHOWER
WILL SOBER ME UP."**

False. They may make you feel more alert, but only time lowers the amount of alcohol in your blood.

MYTH: "ALCOHOL HELPS ME SLEEP."

Partly true, mostly unhelpful. It can make you fall asleep faster, but tends to disturb sleep later in the night. Many people notice they sleep better during a month off.

**MYTH: "IF I SLIP UP, THE MONTH IS
RUINED."**

False. A slip is information, not failure. Notice what led to it and carry on.

06

CHAPTER SIX · SCOTLAND

Alcohol in Scotland

Scotland has a complicated relationship with drink, and some world-first policies to tackle harm.

What the evidence says

- **Deaths.** National Records of Scotland reported 1,185 alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland in 2024, 7% fewer than in 2023 and the lowest number since 2019. “Alcohol-specific” means deaths from causes wholly due to alcohol, such as alcoholic liver disease, so the full toll is higher.¹¹
- **Minimum unit pricing.** Scotland was the first country in the world to introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol, in 2018. On 30 September 2024, it rose from 50p to 65p per unit.¹²

What 65p a unit means

DRINK	UNITS	MINIMUM PRICE
70cl bottle of 40% whisky	28	£18.20
75cl bottle of 13% wine	9.75	£6.34
4 x 440ml cans of 4% lager	7.04	£4.58

Calculated by Clarity Guides: units × 65p,
rounded to the nearest penny.

07

CHAPTER SEVEN · YOUR PLAN

Your month, week by week

A little planning makes a big difference.
Here's a simple plan.

Before you start (late December)

- 1 Decide your start date.** 1 January is traditional, but any day works.
- 2 Tell people.** Friends are more supportive when they know.
- 3 Clear the house.** Move alcohol out of sight, or give it away.
- 4 Stock up on alternatives.** See chapters 9 and 10.
- 5 Sign up for support.** Alcohol Change UK's free Try Dry app and daily emails can help.²

Week 1: getting going

- Notice when you usually drink, and plan something else for those times.
- Expect cravings at familiar times; they usually pass in 15 to 20 minutes.
- Drink water, eat well, get an early night.

Week 2: new routines

- Try a new evening activity: a walk, a class, a film.
- Note any changes in sleep or mood.
- Plan for your first social event.

Week 3: the wobble

- Many people find motivation dips mid-month. Re-read your reasons.
- Treat yourself with the money saved.
- If you slip, carry on: don't restart the count from scratch unless you want to.

Week 4: looking ahead

- What have you noticed?

- Decide what you want after January (chapter 12).
- Celebrate finishing.

08

CHAPTER EIGHT · SOCIAL LIFE

Pubs, parties and peer pressure

Social situations are often the hardest part. A few prepared answers help.

Things to say

IF SOMEONE SAYS...	YOU COULD SAY...
"Go on, just one."	"I'm doing Dry January — I'm enjoying it."
"Why aren't you drinking?"	"I'm driving / training / just fancied a break."
"You're no fun."	"I'll still be here at the end of the night!"
"Are you pregnant / ill?"	"No, just taking a month off." (You don't owe anyone details.)

Tips

- Get your first drink in quickly, so you're not offered one.

- Choose a drink you actually enjoy.
- Arrange to arrive later or leave earlier.
- Bring a supportive friend.
- Suggest activities that aren't based around drinking: a walk, a café, a cinema trip.

09

CHAPTER NINE • ALCOHOL-FREE

Alcohol-free drinks explained

Alcohol-free beers, wines and spirits have improved a lot. But labels can be confusing.

What the labels mean (current UK guidance)

LABEL	ALCOHOL CONTENT
Alcohol-free	0.05% ABV or less
De-alcoholised	Over 0.05%, up to 0.5% ABV
Low alcohol	Over 0.5%, up to 1.2% ABV

The UK Government has been considering raising the “alcohol-free” threshold to 0.5%, but as of October 2026 no final decision had been published.¹³

WATCH OUT

Some drinks labelled 0.5% contain small amounts of alcohol. If you're in recovery, pregnant or avoiding alcohol for medical or religious reasons, check the label carefully, and talk to your GP or midwife if you're unsure. Some people in recovery find that drinks that taste like alcohol trigger cravings.

Comparing types

TYPE	GOOD FOR	WATCH OUT FOR
Alcohol-free beer and lager	Pubs, sport, social occasions	Some are high in sugar
Alcohol-free wine	Meals, celebrations	Taste varies a lot; try a few
Alcohol-free spirits	Mixed drinks	Can be pricey for what you get
Kombucha	A grown-up, tangy taste	Can contain traces of alcohol
Sparkling water with fruit	Anytime, cheap	—

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CHAPTER TEN · RECIPES

Six alcohol-free drinks to make at home

Simple recipes using everyday ingredients.

Ginger and lime fizz

Fill a glass with ice. Add the juice of half a lime and a few slices of fresh ginger. Top with soda water and a dash of ginger ale.

Winter warmer

Gently heat apple juice with a cinnamon stick, two cloves and a slice of orange. Don't boil. Serve warm.

Cranberry spritz

Half cranberry juice, half sparkling water, a squeeze of orange, and a sprig of rosemary.

Cucumber cooler

Muddle three slices of cucumber with a few mint leaves. Add ice, a squeeze of lime and tonic water.

Berry shrub

Mix one tablespoon of fruit vinegar (or apple cider vinegar) with one teaspoon of honey and crushed berries. Top up with sparkling water.

Hot chocolate treat

Make hot chocolate with milk or a plant milk; add a pinch of cinnamon and a little orange zest.

CLARITY TIP

Use a nice glass. Having a special drink in a special glass can help mark the end of the working day, without alcohol.

II

CHAPTER ELEVEN · TRACK IT

Sleep, mood and money

Keeping a simple record helps you see the difference a month makes.

Money saved

Work out what you usually spend on alcohol in a week, then multiply by four.

ITEM	USUAL WEEKLY COST
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How I feel (score 1 to 5)

WEEK	SLEEP	MOOD	ENERGY	NOTES
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I2

CHAPTER TWELVE · AFTER JANUARY

What happens next?

The end of January is a good moment to decide what you want. There's no right answer.

Carry on

Some people feel so good they keep going for another month, or longer.

Drink less

Aim to stay within the guidelines, with drink-free days each week.

Go back to before

That's your choice, but notice what you've learned.

Get support

If the month was harder than you expected, that's worth talking about with your GP or Drinkline.

Questions to ask yourself

1. What did I enjoy most about the month?
2. What did I miss?
3. Which situations were hardest?
4. What would I like my drinking to look like in six months?

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN · SOBER CURIOUS

What is “sober curious”?

“Sober curious” describes people who question their drinking habits without necessarily giving up for good. It’s about choosing to drink, or not, on purpose.

What it can look like

- Only drinking on special occasions.
- Choosing alcohol-free drinks most of the time.
- Having long breaks, such as Dry January and a summer month.
- Noticing why you want a drink before you have one.

Questions sober-curious people ask

1. Am I drinking because I want to, or out of habit?

2. How do I feel the next day?
3. What would I do with the time and money instead?
4. Who around me supports my choices?

What the evidence says

- **Less is better for health.** Because no safe level of drinking has been identified, drinking less is likely to lower health risks, whatever you drink now.⁵

I4

CHAPTER FOURTEEN · OTHERS

Supporting someone else

You might be doing Dry January with someone, or worried about someone's drinking.

Doing it together

- Agree how you'll support each other.
- Plan alcohol-free things to do.
- Don't police each other; encourage instead.

If you're worried about someone

- Choose a calm moment, when they're sober.
- Talk about what you've noticed, using "I" statements: "I've been worried..."
- Listen more than you talk.
- Look after yourself too.

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs offers support to families: 08080 10 10 11.¹⁰

I5

CHAPTER FIFTEEN · WORKBOOK

Your 31-day tracker

Tick each day, and add a word about how it went.

DAY	ALCOHOL-FREE?	HOW I FELT
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DAY	ALCOHOL-FREE?	HOW I FELT
-----	---------------	------------

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DAY	ALCOHOL-FREE?	HOW I FELT
-----	---------------	------------

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DAY	ALCOHOL-FREE?	HOW I FELT
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Looking back on my month

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN · CRAVINGS

Your cravings toolkit

Cravings are normal, especially at the times you used to drink. They rise, peak and fade, usually within minutes. These techniques help you ride them out.

DELAY

Tell yourself: “I’ll decide in 20 minutes.” Set a timer and do something else.

DISTRACT

Go for a walk, run a bath, call a friend, tidy a drawer.

DRINK SOMETHING ELSE

Have your alternative drink ready in the fridge.

URGE SURFING

Notice the craving like a wave. Where do you feel it? Breathe slowly and watch it rise and fall without acting on it.

HALT

Ask: am I Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired?
Deal with that first.

PLAY IT FORWARD

Picture tomorrow morning: how will you feel if you drink? If you don't?

TALK

Text someone who knows you're doing this.

My triggers and plans

WHEN I USUALLY WANT A
DRINK

WHAT I'LL DO INSTEAD

I7

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN · EVENINGS

Building new evening routines

For many people, a drink marks the end of the working day. Replacing the ritual, not just the drink, makes the month easier.

Change the signal

Change clothes, light a candle, or put on music when you finish work.

Move

A short walk or stretch after work can lift mood and energy.

Learn something

A class, a language app, a craft.

Rest properly

An earlier bedtime, a good book, no screens for the last half-hour.

My new evening routine

DAY	WHAT I'LL DO AFTER WORK OR IN THE EVENING

I8

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN · MONEY

What alcohol costs over a year

Small amounts add up. Use these examples, then work out your own.

HABIT	PER WEEK	PER YEAR (52 WEEKS)
A £7 bottle of wine, three times a week	£21	£1,092
Four £5 pints on a Friday and Saturday	£40	£2,080
A £20 bottle of spirits each week	£20	£1,040
Two £9 cocktails a week	£18	£936

Example prices are illustrative, not quotes.
Calculated by Clarity Guides.

My own sums

WHAT I USUALLY BUY	COST PER WEEK	COST PER YEAR
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What I'll do with the money

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CHAPTER NINETEEN · WELLBEING

Alcohol, mood and getting help

Many people drink to cope with stress, low mood or loneliness. A month off can bring those feelings to the surface, which is a reason to be kind to yourself, and to reach out.

- If you feel low or anxious most days for more than two weeks, speak to your GP.
- Breathing Space (Scotland) offers free, confidential listening: 0800 83 85 87.
- Samaritans: 116 123, 24 hours a day.
- In an emergency, call 999.

Questions you could ask your GP

1. Is my drinking affecting my health?
2. Is it safe for me to stop suddenly?
3. Could my medication interact with alcohol?

4. Are there local services that could help?
5. Would a blood test or health check be useful?

My notes for the appointment

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CHAPTER TWENTY · DAILY PROMPTS

31 prompts for your month

One short question for each day of January. Write a line or two in a notebook, or in the space on the tracker pages.

DAY	PROMPT
1	Why am I doing this?
2	What will I drink instead tonight?
3	Who can I tell?
4	When was my first craving, and what helped?
5	What did I do this evening instead?
6	How did I sleep?
7	What's one thing I'm proud of this week?
8	What social event is coming up, and what's my plan?
9	How much money have I saved so far?
10	What's been easier than I expected?
11	What's been harder?
12	What would I tell a friend doing this?

DAY	PROMPT
13	How is my mood today?
14	What new drink have I tried?
15	Halfway! How do I feel?
16	What did I learn about my habits?
17	What time of day is hardest?
18	How has my energy changed?
19	What's a treat I can buy with my savings?
20	Who has supported me?
21	What will I do this weekend?
22	What did I notice about other people's drinking?
23	How do I feel in the mornings?
24	What do I want to keep from this month?
25	What do I miss least?
26	What do I miss most?
27	What will February look like?
28	How will I celebrate finishing?
29	Who could I encourage next year?
30	What surprised me most?
31	Well done. What did this month teach me?

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE · A PAUSE

Take a breath

The picture on this page, Hiroshige's *Evening Snow at Kanbara*, shows a village quiet under falling snow. January can be a quiet month too. Use this page to pause.



Utagawa Hiroshige, *Evening Snow at Kanbara*, c.1833. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain.

A one-minute breathing exercise

- 1 Sit comfortably.** Let your shoulders drop.

- 2 Breathe in slowly through your nose for a count of four.**
- 3 Breathe out slowly for a count of six.**
- 4 Repeat five times.** Notice how you feel afterwards.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO · QUICK ANSWERS

Frequently asked questions

Short answers to the questions people ask most.

DO I HAVE TO START ON 1 JANUARY?

No. Any 31 days will do. Some people do “Dry February” or a summer month instead.

WHAT IF I SLIP UP?

Carry on. One drink doesn’t undo the month. Think about what led to it and plan for next time.

WILL I LOSE WEIGHT?

Some people do, because alcohol contains calories and can lead to snacking. In the 2018 study in chapter 2, the average weight loss was 1.5%.³

IS ALCOHOL-FREE BEER “CHEATING”?

Not for most people. But if you're in recovery, talk to your support team first.

CAN I DRIVE THE MORNING AFTER DRINKING?

Alcohol can still be in your blood the next morning. Scotland's drink-drive limit is lower than in England and Wales. The safest choice is not to drink at all if you're driving.

SHOULD I TELL MY WORKPLACE?

Only if you want to. Some workplaces run team challenges.

IS A MONTH ENOUGH TO TELL IF I HAVE A PROBLEM?

If you found it very hard to stop, or kept thinking about drinking, that's worth talking about with your GP or Drinkline Scotland.¹⁰

WHAT ABOUT BURNS NIGHT?

It falls on 25 January. Plan ahead: an alcohol-free toast works just as well.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE · WEEKLY CHECK-INS

Four weekly check-ins

At the end of each week, take ten minutes to look back.

Week 1

QUESTION	MY ANSWER
What went well?	
What was hard?	
How did I sleep?	
Money saved	
One thing to try next week	

Week 2

QUESTION**MY ANSWER**

What went well?

What was hard?

How did I sleep?

Money saved

One thing to try next
week

Week 3

QUESTION**MY ANSWER**

What went well?

What was hard?

How did I sleep?

Money saved

One thing to try next
week

Week 4

QUESTION

MY ANSWER

What went well?

What was hard?

How did I sleep?

Money saved

One thing to try next
week

My January social calendar

DATE	EVENT	MY PLAN

REFERENCE

Help and support

Drinkline Scotland	0800 7314 314 (Mon–Fri 9am–8pm; Sat–Sun 11am–4pm)
Alcoholics Anonymous	0800 9177 650
Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs	08080 10 10 11 · helpline@sfad.org.uk
With You	wearewithyou.org.uk (online chat)
NHS 24	111
Emergency	999
Breathing Space	0800 83 85 87
Samaritans	116 123
Alcohol Change UK (Dry January, Try Dry app)	alcoholchange.org.uk
NHS inform alcohol pages	nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol

REFERENCE

Glossary

ABV

Alcohol by volume: the percentage of a drink that is pure alcohol.

Alcohol-free

In current UK guidance, 0.05% ABV or less.

Alcohol-specific death

A death from a cause wholly due to alcohol.

Craving

A strong urge to drink, which usually passes.

De-alcoholised

A drink with alcohol removed, up to 0.5% ABV.

Dependence

When the body has adapted to alcohol, so stopping causes withdrawal symptoms.

Minimum unit pricing

The lowest price alcohol can be sold for in Scotland, based on its units (65p since 30 September 2024).

Sober curious

Questioning your drinking and choosing on purpose whether to drink.

Unit

10ml or 8g of pure alcohol.

Withdrawal

Symptoms when a dependent drinker stops; can be dangerous.

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Image credits

Cover illustration

A 31-day calendar, drawn by Clarity Guides.

Chapter 21 picture

Utagawa Hiroshige, *Evening Snow at Kanbara*, from *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, c.1833. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain.

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A CLARITY GUIDE

Dry January

Making the confusing clear.

PUBLISHED BY CLARITY GUIDES

*In a world full of disinformation, get **Clarity**.*

This guide is general information, not medical advice. If you drink heavily or every day, speak to your GP before stopping. Clarity Guides is independent and not linked to any organisation named here. For your personal use only.