

The Sober Curious Extend Dry January

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
February 7 2020 2:43 PM



PEORIA - Whole Foods Global Market named “Zero Proof Drinks” among its Top Ten Food Trends for 2020 and it’s in direct response to the fact that the largest generation of consumers, millennials, is drinking less.

The Beverage Information Group reports beer sales have slumped for five years in a row. Alcohol brands such as Heinken are paying attention to what marketers believe is more than just a passing fad by creating no alcohol beer and spirits. Also called “elective sobriety,” the choice to abstain is not brought on by addiction issues, but rather a desire for a more productive, healthy lifestyle.

The “sober curious” movement includes people drinking less in general and it is qualifying as a movement supported by research from the well-known Nielsen research company. It reported 47% of American adults said they wanted to drink less alcohol last year and the company predicts the trend will continue into 2020.

OSF HealthCare’s Medical Director for Behavioral Health Dr. Samuel Sears says moving away from alcohol consumption is a positive trend supported by new medical research showing even moderate alcohol use is not good.

“The literature for a long time pointed toward low-and-moderate alcohol use being potentially protective whereas the newer literature is starting to question whether that’s true and that really not using alcohol is probably the healthiest thing available to somebody,” he shared.

Long term drinking also increases the risk of developing, diabetes, strokes, hypertension and depression.

Dr. Sears added, “There are increased cancer rates associated with alcohol use, worse for the more you drink so these are very good health choices in terms of making that switch.”

With headlines such as, “The Year the Mocktail Goes Mainstream,” it appears there’ll be more options on store shelves and in restaurants for anyone who wants to extend a Dry January into the rest of the year. Dr. Sears is excited about increased options for his patients on antidepressants who should not be drinking alcohol because it depresses the central nervous system.

“When you’re activating that GABA system while you’re on medication for something like depression or anxiety, it’s actually impairing that medication’s ability to work by sending signals further downstream and really negating some of the benefits you’re getting from your medication otherwise. So, from a mental health standpoint, there’s a very good reason to stay away from or minimize alcohol use,” he emphasized.

Whether it’s temporary temperance or a more permanent choice, Dr. Sears says not drinking alcohol helps people avoid other unhealthy behaviors: binge eating unhealthy food, not sticking to an exercise routine, and irregular sleep brought on by alcohol which reduces the all-important rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. The more you drink before bed, the more pronounced the effects according to research.

Dr. Sears is also optimistic the culture shift will make it easier for health care providers to talk with their patients about alcohol use.

He stressed, “This is a general health concern and something that really we would encourage primary care providers to be talking with their patients about because it does impact basically every aspect of a person’s health over their lifetime.”

Always check to make sure you are not taking medication that will interact badly with alcohol, including beer. Drinking in moderation is defined as one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.

If you want help moving to an alcohol free lifestyle, OSF HealthCare can provide support.