

Health & Well-being

RoodlaneMedical
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Dr Gill's Blog



I did "dry January" this year for the first time. I am not a big drinker but it creeps up in December and I did feel the social pressure to drink so it felt like a good opportunity for a reset.

Apart from a glass of champagne at the River Café one lunchtime I kept on track.

I found a good drink for me – tonic water with angostura bitters. It has a very small amount of alcohol so it smells like a drink and looks a bit more interesting. The health benefits almost go without saying but they are worth repeating:

- A chance for the liver to have a rest.
- Resetting "normal" by reducing your alcohol tolerance which means that you genuinely do stand a good chance of drinking less throughout 2017
- Respite from the effects of alcohol on all your other organs (the heart for example can be affected)
- Weight loss

It's actually a long list.

What I would like to share is the personal experience. I did think about having a drink when I was out with friend for the first 7-10 days.

That feeling then passed and I found it increasingly easy to say 'no' and as friends got used to me saying that we all found it easier.

Some people do want you to "join in" perhaps partly because they can't quite make the commitment to stop for a while themselves - complex dynamics. Alcohol is, after all, addictive.

My sleep improved almost immediately and I think I had a better quality and quantity of sleep on a really consistent basis than I normally do (but normally I am a good sleeper).



I felt bouncier. I can't think of a better word to describe it. Springier.

Around day 10 I was chatting to a friend who spontaneously mentioned her mood had improved (she was doing the same dry January) and it struck me that my mood was better too. I lost weight and I found it easier to resist unhealthy food choices.

If I had to pick out one or two top-line benefits I would say it was improved sleep and better mood/energy.

Looking after your Lifestyle

Good Night?



It's certainly not gone unnoticed with the lighter evenings (in between the unpredictable snow showers!) spring has started to make its very welcome appearance. With this gradual seasonal shift also sees a change in our own behavioural patterns- sleep being one of these. The Norwegian University of Science of Technology conducted a recent survey on 18,000 people between the ages of 20 and 65.

The survey found that lack of sleep can result in harmful effects on the airways which may lead to asthma. The results identified a 65% increased risk of developing asthma over the next 11 years for those experiencing difficulty in falling asleep and astonishingly an 108% increased chance for those who experienced poor quality sleep most nights.

With National Bed Month (organised by [The Sleep Council](#)) in March, what better time to think about your own sleep patterns and the small changes we can make to help improve and promote a better night's sleep for a brighter morning and better health. Insomnia is a common sleep problem that we all may have experienced on occasion and with this reduction in sleep quality and quantity can cause symptoms such as irritability, poor performance, stress and a change in diet (eg increased caffeine intake).

Sleep deprivation can make you feel lethargic and in constant need of a nap so the following offers some 'bedtime reading' to help you with some changes you could apply to your routine and help promote better sleep hygiene:

- Regulate your body clock and keep to a sleep schedule, trying not to divert away from this during weekends.
- Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual. A relaxing routine just before bedtime can help aid and promote good quality sleep. Just ten minutes of mindfulness is a practice that many people use and continues to be an ever popular technique for those with busy lifestyles.
- Try to avoid naps, especially at the weekends as you may find this interrupts your sleep pattern in the evening.
- Ensure your bedroom is a place of sanctuary, with minimum noise and free from light. An eye mask may help if you do not have blackout curtains/blinds. Is your bed comfortable? Check your mattress and pillow is comfortable and supports you- musculoskeletal pain can play a big part in our sleep pattern.

Exercise is a great way to help promote better sleep and working out in the morning or afternoons is proven to help positively impact your performance and sleep. Afternoon workouts, particularly aerobic ones may also help with overcoming insomnia. Try to avoid exercise in the evenings as the boost in body temperature may interfere with falling asleep. Gentle exercise such as yoga or stretching can help you unwind and relax before bedtime

Remember, small changes can make a big difference!

For more information or advice, speak to your GP or arrange a health screen. To learn more about how we can help support your wellbeing programme, please contact us.

Doctors Corner

Dear Dr,

I recently went into a pharmacy looking for a painkiller for a mild headache. I think I was getting a head-cold. I felt totally confused by the rows of shelves marked 'painkillers'. There were so many different kinds with various combinations that I felt totally overwhelmed and left just buying a simple pack of paracetamol which I do admit helped my headache.



However I have heard too much paracetamol is bad for you too. The next day the headache came back and the paracetamol didn't work quite as well and then I started to get the sniffles, a runny nose and a fever too. What could I have added to the paracetamol safely?

Dear X

This is a common question we get asked.

Essentially there are four over the counter painkillers that also act to reduce a fever too:

- Paracetamol (acetaminophen for our American readers),
- Ibuprofen
- Codeine
- Aspirin.

They come in a variety of brands and combinations and you're correct, there are side-effects if taking too much or the wrong combination together.

My recommendation to you would be to go for pure single compound drugs (like you did) to start with and then you can add on if necessary. Unbranded products are as effective as their more expensive branded counterparts, so you don't need to spend more to get the same chemical compound and efficacy. Always read the package insert of any medication you buy. Below are the adult maximum doses for these drugs:

- Paracetamol 500mg - 2 tablets/capsules (1000mg) 6 hourly ie. a maximum of 8 tablets/capsules a day, Exceeding this dose can adversely impact your liver. As a general rule most medications shouldn't be taken on an empty stomach but with paracetamol this isn't as much of an issue.

- Ibuprofen 200mg – 2 tablets/capsules (400mg) 8 hourly ie. a maximum of 6 (200mg) tablets/capsules a day. Too much of this can irritate your stomach and it is important to take ibuprofen with food preferably on a full stomach. If you have asthma it is best to avoid ibuprofen as this can affect your airways and cause a wheeze.
- Aspirin 300mg – 1-3 tablets (300-900mg) 6 hourly ie a maximum of 12 tablets a day. Aspirin should not be given to children under 16 and is best avoided if breast feeding too. It can also irritate your stomach so it should be taken with food and is best to be avoided by asthmatics as well.
- Codeine - over the counter codeine preparations' usually come as low doses in combination with paracetamol eg 500mg of paracetamol with 8mg of codeine phosphate. The codeine element may enhance pain relief but tends to cause drowsiness, so these products may be helpful to take at night if the pain is affecting your sleep. Codeine can cause constipation so ensure you drink a lot of water and bulk up on fibre if you take a compound containing codeine. The dosing is similar to paracetamol ie 1-2 tablets/capsules (8/500) 6 hourly ie a maximum of 8 tablets/capsules a day.

It is safe to use paracetamol, ibuprofen and codeine together as long as you don't exceed the maximum doses stated above. However you should not use ibuprofen and aspirin together. You mentioned that you also developed nasal symptoms, so it sounds like a viral 'cold' (upper respiratory tract infection). To alleviate your stuffy nose you could add on a decongestant tablet. Again, I would recommend using a single compound and adding it to your painkiller. There are a huge variety of decongestant brands out there whose primary component is pseudoephedrine.

Pseudoephedrine 60mg tablet/capsules can be taken 3-4 times a day. They do have various side effects, the most common being a racing heart and restlessness. Pseudoephedrine can be taken in combination with all the painkillers mentioned above not exceeding the recommended doses outlined above. Often brands with pseudoephedrine already come in combination with one or more of the painkillers we have discussed so always check what compounds are included and do not take additional painkillers if buying combination products as you could exceed the maximum dose and put yourself at risk of side effects.

This list is not exhaustive and I recommend you always read the label and package inserts or ask the pharmacist or your doctor if you're not sure.

I hope you find this helpful.

This month's Doctor's Corner was provided by Roodlane GP Dr Robyn Cohen.





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