

# Backyard Banter: Did you struggle with Dry July?

Janet Thompson, chairwoman of The Retreat NZ • 13:00, Sep 09 2019



SUPPLIED

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**Opinion:** Dry July has received great publicity and momentum, and I applaud it, but I wonder how many people struggled to get through it or maybe didn't even attempt it because they knew it would be too difficult.

Do you relate to any of the following:

1. You drink every night – and the one or two glasses you used to enjoy have now become one or two bottles, despite trying hard to drink less.
2. You don't drink every night, but when you do drink, you almost always end up drinking far too much and not remembering parts of the night and/or doing and saying things that make you feel ashamed and regretful. You start to tell little "white lies" to hide the effects of your drinking.
3. When you are not drinking, you think about when you are going to drink next and/or you feel increasingly restless, irritable and discontent with your life (even when things are going well).

Admitting that we may have a problem with alcohol is a difficult thing to do – what you may not know is that alcoholism is a disease and it is nothing to be ashamed of. Also, you cannot recover from it on your own. The reality is that people don't want to think that they (or a family member) may be suffering from alcoholism as in their minds alcoholics are weak-minded individuals, who just need to "get their act together and sort out their drinking".

The irony is that you would not ignore the symptoms of heart disease, cancer or diabetes and think, "I know that this is a problem but I think I can sort this out on my own – I won't tell anyone or ask for help". Ignoring the symptoms of alcoholism or thinking you can solve it on your own is just as silly as thinking you can solve any other disease by just "trying harder".

What can make it worse is loved ones saying to someone who is struggling with alcohol, "if you loved me, you would not drink like you are drinking". They would not think of saying to someone, "if you loved me, you would not have got cancer".

Just because you have a problem with alcohol at the moment does not necessarily mean that you are an alcoholic. You may just be a heavy drinker, and you may be able to solve it on your own by just cutting down your intake. However, if you have the disease of alcoholism, cutting down or trying to control your drinking is not going to work for you – things will just get worse.

I hear you say – how can I tell if I am a heavy drinker or an alcoholic? Try this: for the next month, just have one glass of your favourite "tipple" every night. Don't change your nightly routines or anything else. Just have one glass of alcohol each night and then skip to something non-alcoholic for the rest of the night. Don't skip a night, and be sure to just have one glass. If you cannot do it, or if you can do it but cannot enjoy it, you may be suffering from the disease of alcoholism. It is OK if you are – there are many other individuals just like you who are now leading healthy, successful and contented lives.

Admitting that you may have the disease of alcoholism and asking for help is the first step to help you become well. I urge you to take that step if you think you need to.

*Janet Thompson is the chairwoman of The Retreat NZ, a registered charity that runs a 12-step based private alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre based in Ōtāhuhu, Auckland.*