

When you put down the drink, you may be looking forward to increased energy, a clear mind and a new wardrobe to celebrate the kilos that will drop off without you trying.

Those things will come, but they won't come immediately. It's important to understand what to expect in the first few weeks of sobriety so that you don't panic and give it up as a bad bet. Stick with it: it's worth it!

Energy

No more hangovers means that you'll be leaping out of bed as soon as the sun peeks over the horizon, right? Wrong. Most people who get sober find that in the first two or three weeks they feel exhausted.

There are a few reasons for this. One is that you might have trouble getting to sleep in the first few days; if you have been drinking heavily for a while, then you are used to the sedative effect of the alcohol. Take that away and you'll find that your mind and body can't relax. Don't worry; the good news is that once your body does adjust, your sleep will be deeper and more refreshing than it has been for a long time.

Even once you are sleeping better, though, you might feel some residual tiredness. Others have described it as akin to having a mild cold, or, for women, like early pregnancy. Don't fight it - your body is asking for time to heal. Go to bed early and sleep in as long as you can. As a bonus, more time sleeping means less time craving alcohol, and early nights are a powerful tool in your toolbox right now.

Weight

You've been drinking a bottle of wine a night, or two, or a case of beer, or a bottle of whisky. Whatever you drank, the chances are that you were taking in hundreds, even thousands of calories per day. Now that you've cut that out, the weight should drop straight off.

Just like with your energy levels, though, this doesn't happen immediately. Despite your calorie intake going down, it is not unusual for your weight to go up at first. Don't panic! Once your energy levels come back and your body finds its equilibrium again, the chances are good that you will lose that extra weight and then some - even if you do continue to allow yourself a piece of chocolate cake from time to time.

Mood

Alcohol is a depressant. Without that acting on you all the time - and without the crippling hangovers and interrupted sleep that render you tired and in pain - you should be able to expect to be happier and less cranky, right? Again, this is a benefit of sobriety that comes with time. Alcohol is a depressant, but habitual drinkers are so used to its effect that the rest of their emotional wiring is hooked up

around it, as it were. One of the things that most drinkers find, once they put down the glass, is that they have been emotionally numbed for years. Suddenly they are indeed happier - but they're also grumpier, sadder, more excited and prone to greater anxiety. This, too, stabilises after a while, although you don't return to that state of numbness. Love, joy, wonder and contentment all stay elevated, which is just as it should be.

So with all of that in mind, do you still want to be sober? You should do. If alcoholism is a disease, and it is, then it makes sense that in early recovery you need to convalesce. Treat yourself as if you were an invalid: eat healthy, small, tempting meals, get plenty of sleep and clear your diary of any non-essential commitments. This is one of the most valuable things that a residential rehab can offer you: the chance to get away from your usual commitments and focus on your recovery while your body starts to repair itself. It is often impossible to break your bad habits and say no to the commitments that stretch you too thin unless you remove yourself from your usual haunts completely.

But if that isn't an option, then remember that the same principles apply wherever you are. Rest, recuperate, treat yourself kindly, and you'll be laying the foundations for a solid, sober life.