

Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol

Alcohol is a normal part of many peoples' lives, but for others it can be destructive. The government recommends weekly safe drinking limits to be 14 units for both men and women. This is a reduction from the last few years. This reflects new research which has showed higher levels can increase the risk of all kinds of cancer. The Government have withdrawn guidance on safe amounts to drink in one session, but suggest having several alcohol-free days per week. The risks of binge drinking but may be maintaining safe weekly limits, relate to accidents, injuries and putting oneself in unsafe situations. The guidance remains that pregnant women should not drink as it can affect the unborn baby.

1 UNIT = 1 shot of spirit; or 1 small glass of wine (125ml); or ½ pint of normal strength beer.

The effects of alcohol can be experienced as fun, relaxing and sociable. However it can cause serious problems long before dependence (i.e. addiction) occurs. As the volume of alcohol regularly consumed increases, so do the risks.

Effects of alcohol misuse

Physical health: Short term and permanent brain damage, nerve and liver damage, bleeding and death are all risks. Withdrawal symptoms include shaking, sweating, sickness, anxiety, fitting and

at worse hallucinations and reduced consciousness.

Mental health: Alcohol is a depressant even though it may feel like a 'lift'. It may worsen existing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and psychosis. It can also trigger them for the first time.

Social: Changes in behaviour through alcohol use may cause problems with relationships, problems with employment or result in a criminal record. These will directly affect self-esteem.

Statistics

In 2014/15 there were 1.1 million estimated admissions to hospital where alcohol related disease, injury or condition was the primary reason for admission or a secondary diagnosis. Men represented 2/3rds of these admissions.

In 2014 there were 6,831 deaths relating to alcohol; which was an increase of 13% from 2004.

More than 9 million people in England drink more than the recommended limits.

Alcohol dependency

With continued excessive drinking dependence may develop. At this point the drinker has an intense desire to drink and experiences withdrawal symptoms when not drinking: controlling these with more drinking.



Alcohol becomes the focus of their life despite an awareness that it is causing them harm, and they need to drink more and more, often of the same drink, to feel drunk. The drinker has difficulty controlling how much they drink and when they start and stop drinking.

Drugs

Drugs are classified as A, B or C depending on how harmful they are when misused. They can be smoked, inhaled, snorted, swallowed, injected or rubbed into the gums.

Effects of Drug use

Physical health: each drug and the way of administering it has its own potential health problems. These include smoking-related diseases, abnormal heart rhythms, blood borne infections: Hepatitis B, C and HIV, abscesses and blood clots.

Mental health: Many drugs can trigger anxiety, depression and psychosis, which may be short lived or more permanent. The 'come-down' can make people feel irritable and paranoid.

Social: Like alcohol misuse, drug use can affect all parts of a person's life.

Pregnancy: there is no 'safe' amount of illicit drug use in pregnancy. Drugs can affect all areas of the baby's development and cause stillbirth.

Withdrawal symptoms: Physical and psychological addiction to drugs can occur and withdrawal symptoms range from cravings and feeling low to severe cramps and fits.

Statistics

In 2014 around 8.6% of adults (16-59) had taken an illicit substance in the past year. 19.4% of

young adults (16-24) had taken illicit drugs in the past year. 34.7% of adults had taken illicit substances at some point in their lifetime.

Executive Summary - Trends in Alcohol use and treatment

Nationally, alcohol consumption appears to be declining. In Great Britain, between 2005 - 2012 the proportion of men who drank alcohol fell from 72% to 64%, and the proportion of women fell from 57% to 52%.

This is not reflected in health data which shows a continuing high number of hospital admissions due to alcohol related conditions. The overall impact on the healthcare system of young people presenting with alcohol related conditions has doubled in the last decade.

In Cornwall, we have seen significantly higher rates of males and females presenting to hospitals with alcohol-specific conditions than the national average for England, and higher rates for under 18's.

We have also seen higher rates of males presenting in hospitals with alcohol-attributable conditions than the average for England.

In Cornwall, just over a quarter of people who drink alcohol are estimated to drink above the recommended level, and 7% (or 26,700) are drinking at higher risk levels; more than double the recommended levels. In addition, an estimated 84,000 (19%) are binge drinkers

Locally there has been a decline in the number of alcohol users in treatment.

However, based on national estimates 22% of total dependent drinkers in Cornwall are in specialist alcohol treatment compared with 13% nationally. There have been declines in the number of alcohol users who complete

treatment successfully and an increase in representations (come back into treatment within 6 months of successfully completing).

However, Cornwall is still performing well when compared with regional averages.

National estimates have indicated that there are 25,600 higher risk drinkers in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, including 4,900 dependent drinkers who may benefit from some form of specialist alcohol intervention.

Source: Cornwall Alcohol Needs Assessment 2013 / 2014, updated 30 March 2015.

'Families can ask for help in their own right: 'AdFam' provide information, local support groups and helplines for anyone affected by someone else's substance use. Telephone: 020 3817 9410 www.adfam.org.uk

Or via 'al anon': alcoholism affects the whole family, not just the drinker. They are an international organisation with over 800 support groups in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Al-Anon is a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience in order to solve their common problems. Helpline 020 7403 0888 <http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk>

Useful contacts

The user has to ask for help. GPs have information on local groups and support services.

Alcoholics anonymous: – peer support to aid recovery from alcoholism.

Tel: 0800 9177 650 www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Addaction: offers one to one counselling, support groups, rehabilitation and post-detox support working with users and friends and family. Can self-refer. Includes specialist services for women, men, families, over 55's, veterans and under 18's as below www.addaction.org.uk Truro 0333 2000 325

Yzup (Addaction – under 18yrs) – offers support, information and advice to young people under 18 yrs about drugs and alcohol. Contact on: 01872 300816. Out of office hours call 'Talk to Frank'.

Talk to Frank: Freephone 0800 776600 for advice about drugs and alcohol.

Text: 82111 www.talktofrank.com

Needle exchanges in Cornwall can be via Addaction or via many local pharmacies.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Drugs and alcohol action team (DAAT): 01726 223400, 07816 062262 ltarbox@cornwall.gov.uk