

November 2019 - Is Alcohol unknowingly damaging your health?

Figures show the majority of people (79%) drink sensibly and in safe limits but in Kent, approximately 254,000 people are drinking above the recommended safe limits.* There are an estimated 14,000 dependent drinkers in Kent in need of some treatment and support. Kent specialist treatment services can help those in serious risk of harm, and last year around 2,100 people were receiving help from specialist support services.

The Department of Health recommends drinking levels do not regularly exceed more than 14 units a week. One pint of strong beer or cider equals three units, as does a large glass (250ml) of wine. A small glass of wine (175ml) amounts to two units while a bottle of beer can mean 1.5 units but these can all vary depending on the alcoholic strength of the drink.

Many people simply are not aware of how much they are drinking. The KCC 'Know Your Score' interactive online test - www.kent.gov.uk/knowyourscore - can help give some initial guidance by asking users a series of simple questions to help them gauge how much alcohol they are consuming and the effects it could have on their health, in both the short and long-term. Depending on their score, appropriate key messages and vital advice about where to find help are then delivered by different experts and health professionals.

Excessive alcohol consumption can frequently lead to high blood pressure and can trigger an irregular heartbeat, both of which increase the risk of having a stroke. It is also a risk factor for some cancers, particularly head and neck cancers and breast cancer. Heavy drinking increases the risk of having a stroke by more than three times. By drinking sensibly and to the recommended limits you will reduce your risk of having a stroke.

KCC Director for Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark said: "People often underestimate how much they are drinking and it's very easy to go over the safe limits. The 'Know Your Score' tool can help you know if you need treatment. Many people don't realise they may have become dependent on alcohol – at which point they might need treatment.

"There are a range of services available in Kent with health, community and voluntary sectors all helping to get people the treatment they need. If you or a loved one is facing the problems of alcohol addiction, please don't suffer alone. We also have lifestyle services in the community that can support people if they need further help to cut back. Services like One You Kent. 'Know Your Score' will help you to get help if you need it."

A range of formal and informal support is available, such as AA and Smart Recovery (peer support) in Kent and Al-anon for friends, family and carers of alcoholics. KCC also commissions specialist treatment providers to provide structured treatment for alcohol addiction. Forward Trust runs the East Kent Community Drug and Alcohol Service while Change Grow Live (CGL) provides the West Kent Drug and Alcohol Wellbeing Service.

For more information on the treatment, support and recovery services available, go to www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/alcohol-and-drug-support or for help and advice about small changes you can make to improve your health and wellbeing, and find more support in your area regarding your lifestyle, see www.oneyoukent.org.uk

I wish all readers a happy Christmas and a peaceful, healthy New Year for 2020

Geoffrey Lymer
Kent County Councillor, Dover West Ward

