

‘New Year, New You’ is the national campaign now underway with support in Kent to raise awareness of key lifestyle behaviours - such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol, inactivity and unhealthy eating - their effect on people’s health and the support available.

Drinking too much, smoking, inactivity and poor diets can have long term effects on people’s emotional and physical health, leading to an increased risk of many types of cancer, heart and lung disease and stroke and early death.

Try the ‘How are You?’ quiz or book up for a free Health Check\* and find out more about a range of tools, tips and local support services that can help you at [www.oneyoukent.org.uk](http://www.oneyoukent.org.uk)

KCC Director for Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark said: “People are becoming more aware but many still don’t realise the harm that certain lifestyle behaviours are causing their health, in both the short and long term.

“Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can lead to high blood pressure and also trigger an irregular heartbeat, both of which increase the risk of having a stroke. Heavy drinking increases the risk of having a stroke by more than three times. By doing something about one or all of these issues, you will reduce your risk of having a stroke along with many different types of cancer.”

### **Smoking**

Approximately 16.3% of Kent residents are smokers and while the number of smokers has fallen over recent years, many people find it hard to quit; tobacco remains the number one killer in England and a chief cause of long-term poor health with one in four hospital beds occupied by a smoker. In 2016/17 smoking attributable admissions in Kent accounted for 12,444 people.

Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust offers year-round support to quit smoking. Local services such as pharmacies and NHS quit clubs and “do it yourself” quit kits and digital tools (such as mobile apps) are available to support people who want to quit independently. More information can be found [www.oneyoukent.org.uk](http://www.oneyoukent.org.uk) and [www.kent.gov.uk/smokefree](http://www.kent.gov.uk/smokefree) Alternatively, ring 0300 123 1220 (option 1), or text ‘QUIT’ to 87023. You can also find more information at [www.kenthealthandwellbeing.nhs.uk](http://www.kenthealthandwellbeing.nhs.uk)

### **Alcohol**

The majority of the Kent population (79%) drink sensibly and in safe limits (scoring less than seven on AUDIT - an alcohol risk score) but approximately 254,000 people are drinking at higher risk levels. There are an estimated 16,000 dependent drinkers in Kent in need of some treatment and support.

KCC supports the national Dry January campaign and encourages residents to be aware of how much they are drinking by using the ‘Know Your Score’ interactive online test - [www.kent.gov.uk/knowyourscore](http://www.kent.gov.uk/knowyourscore) - which asks users a series of simple questions to help them gauge how the alcohol they are consuming could be affecting their health. Depending on their score, appropriate advice about where to find help are then delivered by different experts and health professionals in a short video.

A range of formal and informal support is also available, such as AA and Smart Recovery (peer support) in Kent and Al-anon for friends, family and carers of alcoholics. KCC Public Health commissions specialist treatment providers to provide structured treatment for alcohol addiction. You can also find more information at [www.oneyoukent.org.uk](http://www.oneyoukent.org.uk)

### **Obesity**

In 2016/17, the Active Lives survey reported that 63 per cent of Kent adults were classified as overweight or obese which is slightly higher than the national figure (61.3 per cent).

The best way to tackle obesity is to eat a healthy, reduced-calorie diet and to exercise regularly. Priorities focus on changeable factors such as helping families to improve poor diets and help for those who need to lose and maintain a healthy weight. KCC supports national initiatives such as Change4Life and One You, alongside community based weight management programmes for adults and fun activity based programmes for families with children and educational programmes in schools.

For 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](http://www.oneyoukent.org.uk)

\*If you're aged 40 to 74 years old, you could also sign up for an NHS Health Check for advice on keeping yourself healthy and active. Your blood pressure, height and weight will be checked. You will be given a small finger prick test to check your blood cholesterol and you'll also be asked some questions about your lifestyle and family history. The check will identify the risk of you developing heart disease, kidney disease, stroke, diabetes or dementia in the future. Find out more at [www.oneyoukent.org.uk](http://www.oneyoukent.org.uk) (search for Health Checks) or call 0300 123 1220 (option 4) to find a clinic near you.

Andrew Scott-Clark added: "We want more people to get the help they need at the right time and this could be in a range of different ways. People do not have to struggle alone, we want them to seek support and information to help them live a healthier life. If people are depressed then we urge them to see their GPs or contact Live Well Kent - who provide community mental health support services – on 0800 567 76 99 and [www.livewellkent.org.uk](http://www.livewellkent.org.uk)"

I wish all readers a peaceful, healthy New Year.

Geoffrey Lymer  
Kent County Councillor  
Dover West Ward