

## Smoking

Research data on smoking shows that there are significant risks to physical health from any level of smoking. Quitting smoking at any stage has a positive effect on these risks.

### The role of health care organisations

In the UK, health care organisations:

- gather data (statistics) about smoking
- analyse data and advise on health risks
- set targets to reduce smoking
- support people to reduce or stop smoking
- influence laws that discourage smoking (no smoking in public places or in cars with children).

**Heart attack** – smokers under 40 have five times a non-smoker's risk of a heart attack

**Cancers** – 80% of lung cancer and a quarter of all cancers result from smoking

**Respiratory problems** – smoking causes one-third of deaths from respiratory problems

**Fitness** – people who smoke are usually less fit

### Risks to physical health

**Sick leave** – because of ill health caused by smoking, teenagers are more likely to have time off school or college and adults are more likely to take time off work

**Infertility** – smoking can lead to sperm abnormalities

**Miscarriage** – smokers are more likely to have a miscarriage, a stillborn child or to lose a child to sudden infant death (SID, cot death)

### UK smoking facts

- Smoking is the major cause of preventable death.
- On average, long-term smokers die 10 years earlier than non-smokers.
- Half of all smokers die because of smoking.
- Twice as many poor and disadvantaged people smoke than others.
- E-cigarettes may be safer than cigarettes.

### Positive effects of quitting

Stopping smoking reduces health risks:

- Within weeks, circulation and immune systems improve.
- After a year, the risk of heart attack falls by 50%.
- After 15 years, all health risks fall to the same level as a non-smoker.

### Barriers to quitting

- Being addicted
- Family and friends smoke
- Fear of gaining weight
- Lack of awareness of support services
- Failing to quit in the past

### Support for quitting smoking

- Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) (skin patches, gum)
- E-cigarettes
- Medication (e.g. varenicline)
- Understanding craving triggers
- Support from family and friends

#### New try this

Give three reasons why it is important that GPs ask their patients about their smoking habits.

The GP's role is to support lifestyle changes, as well as to provide treatment for health conditions.

## Alcohol consumption

Research data on alcohol consumption shows there are risks to physical health from drinking more than recommended limits. Reducing alcohol consumption to within safe limits has a positive effect on these risks.

### Risks to physical health

**Addiction** – some people are unable to stop drinking despite the negative effects on their health and wellbeing.

**Liver disease** – in 2013–2015 around 49% of deaths from liver disease in England were as a result of alcohol.

**Heart disease** – drinking alcohol increases the risk of raised blood pressure.

**Cancer** – 4% of cancers are linked to alcohol consumption.

### Recommended limits

Current advice is that:

- adults should consume no more than 14 units of alcohol per week
- people should avoid binge drinking
- pregnant women should avoid alcohol.

### UK alcohol consumption facts

✓ Of people who drink alcohol, 55% of men and 53% of women drink more than the recommended daily amount (NHS statistic).

✓ Drinking too much alcohol is the biggest risk factor for death, ill health or disability for 15–49 year olds.

✓ There were around 14 alcohol-related deaths per 100,000 people in 2015.

✓ Between 2013 and 2016 around 37.4 people per 100,000 were admitted to hospital because of alcohol.

### Positive effects of reducing alcohol consumption

Stopping drinking or reducing alcohol intake to below recommended levels can lead to improved **physical health**, by reducing the risk of cancer, liver and heart disease and helping weight loss. **Intellectual, emotional and social health** benefit from improved mood, concentration and sleep. The likelihood of making unsafe decisions reduces.

### The role of health care organisations

In the UK, health care organisations:

- gather data (statistics) about alcohol consumption
- analyse and advise on health risks
- set targets to reduce alcohol consumption
- provide advice on safe limits of alcohol
- support people to reduce their alcohol intake or to stop drinking
- influence laws that discourage drinking (places alcohol can be drunk, alcohol limits for drivers).

### Personal data

Health professionals collect data about an individual's drinking habits to advise on the risks to health and wellbeing, and to support lifestyle changes. Health professionals may ask:

- if the individual drinks alcohol
- the number of units they drink per week
- how the units are spread over the week and whether the person binge drinks
- if the person is alcohol dependent (addicted).

#### New try this

Give three reasons why it is important that GPs ask their patients about their drinking habits.

The GP's role is to support health and wellbeing improvements, as well as to provide treatment for health conditions.