**GETTING IT RIGHT WITH ALCOHOL**

Alcoholic drinks are a pleasure for many people, and the festive period may well have seen a significant increase in your consumption. So here we are in January, and one of the challenges for the new year is this: how much alcohol can be enjoyed safely?

There isn’t a completely safe level, but sticking within the guidelines lowers the risk of harm to your health and lifestyle. The NHS recommends a maximum of 14 units a week, preferably spread over three days to reduce its impact.

What exactly is meant by units?

* A glass of wine contains between 1.6 and 3.3 units depending on the size of the glass
* A bottle of wine usually contains 10 units
* A pint of beer, lager or cider contains between 2.3 and 3.5 units depending on its strength
* A 25ml single spirit and mixer contains 1 unit
* A 275ml bottle of pre-mixed drink (alcopop) contains 1.5 units.

Staying within the guidelines has many benefits, and these are just some of them:

* You will reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer
* You are less likely to have an accident
* You are less likely to indulge in risky behaviour
* Your liver can recover and repair any damage
* You will save money
* You will concentrate and sleep better
* Your relationships with others will improve
* You will be less likely to suffer from alcohol-related depression and sexual problems such as impotence.

There are lots of things you can do to cut down on your alcohol units. Some of us can do it just by making the decision, and others will need more help and support. Advice can be obtained from Drinkline on 0800 917 8282 if you are worried about yourself or someone else, and the internet can provide information about support groups in your area.

If you have physical withdrawal symptoms such as shaking, sweating or feeling anxious before your first drink of the day you will need medical advice, as it can be dangerous to stop too quickly. But in that case it’s even more important to tackle the problem, and with help you can succeed.

*Sent by Drs Virmani and Bedi’s patient participation group*