



ALCOHOL INTAKE ADVICE

Professor Michael Escudier, Dean of the Faculty of Dental Surgery at The Royal College of Surgeons, warns that drinking alcohol carries serious oral health risks, including oral cancer, tooth decay, tooth erosion and accidental dental trauma.

'Dry January' has become a popular public health campaign in recent years, with people abstaining from alcohol for the first month of the year in an effort to start the New Year in a healthy way. The Faculty of Dental Surgeons suggests cutting back on alcohol throughout the year should be on everybody's New Year's resolution list.

Commenting on the relationship between alcohol and oral health, Professor Escudier said:

"Drinking too much alcohol has been linked to an array of oral health problems including oral cancer, tooth decay and tooth erosion.

"It also increases the chances of accidental trauma or facial injury because of the higher risk of falling or being involved in an accident when people are intoxicated.

"High alcohol consumption is known to significantly increase the risk of liver disease and this has a 'knock-on' effect for dental treatment. Some commonly prescribed drugs and antibiotics can only be used at lower doses by those who have liver disease – potentially prolonging or reducing the success of dental treatment and, or recovery.

"The Faculty of Dental Surgery would like to see people pledging to cut back on the amount of alcohol they drink throughout the year and not just during "Dry January". I think people are starting to become more aware of just how damaging alcohol can be to their general health, but we want them to know how it impacts their oral health as well."

The Faculty of Dental Surgery explains the oral health risks of alcohol consumption as follows:

- Oral cancer: Increased risk of oral cancer is one of the most important effects of high alcohol consumption, particularly when combined with other unhealthy behaviours. It has been estimated those who drink and smoke heavily have 38 times the risk of developing oral cancer as those who abstain from both.¹
- Tooth decay: There is evidence to suggest that high alcohol use can increase the risk of tooth decay – alcoholics generally have a higher number of decayed teeth requiring extraction or restoration. Some research also suggests that high alcohol consumption can increase the risk of periodontitis (gum disease).²
- Tooth erosion: High alcohol use can also increase the risk of tooth erosion – regular consumption of acidic drinks such as wine, cider and alcopops can contribute to this.
- Accidental dental trauma: Drinking heavily increases the chances of accidental dental trauma or facial injury, for example because of a fall or traffic accident.



The Faculty of Dental Surgery has previously encouraged dental teams to advise patients on the risks to their oral and general health of drinking alcohol and supports guidelines on alcohol consumption published by the UK Chief Medical Officers³.

Advice from the UK's Chief Medical Officers on reducing the risks of alcohol consumption include:

- Not drinking any more than 14 units⁴ of alcohol on a weekly basis;
- If 14 units of alcohol a week are regularly consumed, trying to spread drinking evenly across several days;
- Having several 'drink-free' days every week;
- Avoiding 'binge drinking' - consuming excessive amounts of alcohol on a single occasion – by drinking slowly with food and alternating alcohol with water.

The Faculty of Dental Surgery's campaign to increase awareness of alcohol's impact on oral health is also backed by the Alcohol Health Alliance UK.

Sir Ian Gilmore, Chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance UK, said:

"Alcohol is linked to more than 200 health conditions, including oral health problems such as tooth decay and oral cancer. The Chief Medical Officers' low-risk drinking guidelines recommend that we should not drink more than 14 units a week to keep the risks low.

"However, most people do not know about the guidelines – our polling showed that only 19% of people are able to correctly identify the guidelines. We are calling on the government to do more to raise awareness of the guidelines and to introduce policies such as better alcohol product labelling to help people understand the risks."

Anyone who thinks they may be drinking too much is advised to contact a medical professional, such as their GP. Organisations such as Alcohol Change UK have more information regarding cutting back alcohol consumption and getting help with alcohol abuse.

1. Public Health England (2017) Delivering Better Oral Health: An evidence based toolkit for prevention (Third edition), p.63.

2. Mahesh R Khairnar et al (2017) "Effect of Alcoholism on Oral Health: A Review", Journal of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Volume 5 (Issue 3).

3. Department of Health (2016) UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines.

4. One unit of alcohol is equivalent to half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider (4% alcohol by volume) or half a glass (87.5ml) of wine (12% alcohol by volume).

Source: Escudier, M. (2019, January 4). *Alcohol consumption can damage oral health, warn dental surgeons*. Retrieved from <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/news-and-events/media-centre/press-releases/alcohol-and-teeth/>