

Alcohol and oral health

To book an appointment at Avondale house Dental Surgery as either an existing or new patient please give our reception team a call on **01889 582 080** or visit our website to book your appointment online.

Alcohol can also erode the outer surface of the teeth, leading to a loss of enamel. If this happens, you may need to go to the dentist for a filling.

Drinking too much has also been linked to an increased risk of developing mouth cancer.

The most important risk factors for mouth cancer are the combined effect of smoking AND drinking alcohol.

It's estimated that heavy drinkers and smokers have a 38 times increased risk of developing mouth cancer than people who neither drink nor smoke.

Tips on cutting down

If you regularly drink more than 14 units a week, try these simple tips to help you cut down.

Fourteen units is equivalent to six pints of average-strength beer or 10 small glasses of low-strength wine.

Make a plan

Before you start drinking, set a limit on how much you're going to drink.

Set a budget

Only take a fixed amount of money to spend on alcohol.

Let them know

If you let your friends and family know you're cutting down and it's important to you, you could get support from them.

Take it a day at a time

Cut back a little each day. That way, every day you do is a success.

Make it a smaller one

You can still enjoy a drink, but go for smaller sizes. Try bottled beer instead of pints, or a small glass of wine instead of a large one.

Have a lower-strength drink

Cut down the alcohol by swapping strong beers or wines for ones with a lower strength (ABV in %). You'll find this information on the bottle.

Stay hydrated

Have a glass of water before you have alcohol and alternate alcoholic drinks with water or a soft drink.

Take a break

Have several drink-free days each week.

Benefits of cutting down

The immediate effects of cutting down include:

- feeling better in the mornings
- being less tired during the day
- your skin may start to look better
- you'll start to feel fitter
- you may stop gaining weight

Long-term benefits include:

Mood

There's a strong link between heavy drinking and depression, and hangovers often make you feel anxious and low. If you already feel anxious or sad, drinking can make this worse, so cutting down may put you in a better mood generally.

Sleep

Drinking can affect your sleep. Although it can help some people fall asleep quickly, it can disrupt your sleep patterns and stop you sleeping deeply. So cutting down on alcohol should help you feel more rested when you wake up.

Behavior

Drinking can affect your judgement and behavior. You may behave irrationally or aggressively when you're drunk. Memory loss can be a problem during drinking and in the long term for regular heavy drinkers.

Heart

Long-term heavy drinking can lead to your heart becoming enlarged. This is a serious condition that can't be completely reversed, but stopping drinking can stop it getting worse.

Immune system

Regular drinking can affect your immune system. Heavy drinkers tend to catch more infectious diseases.

Alcohol support

Realizing you have a problem with alcohol is the first step to getting better, but it is often the hardest one.

You may need help if:

- You always feel the need to have a drink.
- You get into trouble because of your drinking.
- Other people warn you about how much you're drinking.

A good place to start is with your GP. Be honest with them about how much you drink.

If your body has become dependent on booze, stopping drinking overnight can be life-threatening, so get advice about cutting down gradually.

Your GP may refer you to a local community alcohol service. Ask about free local support groups, day-centre counselling and one-to-one counselling.

You may be prescribed medication such as chlordiazepoxide, a sedative, to help with alcohol withdrawal symptoms. Alcohol withdrawal symptoms can range from not sleeping, agitation, anxiety, sweating and tremors, right through to vomiting, diarrhoea, hallucinations and seizures.

Staying sober

Cutting down and stopping drinking is often just the beginning, and most people will need some degree of help to stay alcohol-free in the long term.

Getting support – beyond family, friends or carers – is crucial to understanding and overcoming the issues that make you drink.

Ask your GP or alcohol support group about one-to-one counselling or group support in your area.

You can attend NHS and voluntary-agency day centres for up to a year, as well as groups where ex-alcoholics help each other stay sober.

Useful contacts for alcohol problems:

- Drink line is the national alcohol helpline. If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline, in complete confidence. Call 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 9am – 8pm, weekends 11am – 4pm).
- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a free self-help group. Its "12-step" programme involves getting sober with the help of regular support groups.
- Al-Anon Family Groups offer support and understanding to the families and friends of problem drinkers, whether they're still drinking or not. Alateen is part of Al-Anon and can be attended by 12- to 17-year-olds who are affected by another person's drinking, usually a parent.

- Addaction is a UK-wide treatment agency that helps individuals, families and communities to manage the effects of drug and alcohol misuse.
- Adfam is a national charity working with families affected by drugs and alcohol. Adfam operates an online message board and database of local support groups.
- The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (Nacoa) provides a free, confidential telephone and email helpline for children of alcohol-dependent parents and others concerned with their welfare. Call 0800 358 3456 for the Nacoa helpline.

Caring for an alcoholic? Find out where you can get support.

Residential rehabilitation

Most people receive their support to stop drinking in the community. Some need a short stay in a unit with access to 24-hour medical care so they can receive adequate assistance with their withdrawal symptoms or other problems.

This may be an NHS hospital ward or medical unit, or a residential rehabilitation service, depending on the situation.

The best results from residential rehab are achieved when participants stay for at least 12 weeks. Residential rehab is usually reserved for people with medium or high levels of alcohol dependence, particularly those who have received other forms of help that have not been successful.

Days are usually structured, with a combination of one-to-one counselling and group therapy, as well as some chosen activities, such as art therapy, sport, life skills, cooking, financial management and family/couples therapy for relatives.

You may be referred to residential rehab through the NHS. It's also possible to pay to go privately. Medical insurance companies may fund this for a certain period.

There are several websites that provide information on residential rehabilitation units. It's not possible to give advice on which sites are the most useful or balanced in their approach. Use the NHS Choices to find support for alcohol addiction in your area for you or someone you know.

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