

YOUR HEALTH

WE KNOW ALCOHOL CAN WRECK OUR BODIES - BUT WHAT ABOUT ITS LASTING AFFECTS ON OUR ORAL HEALTH? DENTIST **DR ADAM PATEL** HAS THE ANSWERS

Long-term harm that can spoil the party



Q Are there any guidelines on how to measure alcohol consumption?

A With such a vast array of drinks including shots, pint glasses and bottles it is understandably easy to get confused about how many units are in your drink.

Units are a simple way of expressing the quantity of pure alcohol within a drink.

One unit equals 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol, which is approximately the amount of alcohol the average adult can process in an hour.

Q What are the recommended alcohol consumption levels for both men and women?

A The NHS has recommended that men should not regularly drink more than four

units per day, while women should avoid regularly drinking more than three units of alcohol per day.

Further recommendations include avoiding alcohol for a minimum of 48 hours following a heavy drinking session.

It is imperative to understand that these are only guidelines and that any amount of sustained alcohol consumption is likely to be destructive to both oral and general health in the long term.

Q Often when I drink alcohol I consume a wide variety of drinks. I find it extremely difficult to keep count of the number of units I have consumed. Is there an easy way to calculate this?

A Yes. I have the perfect tool for this. The "alcohol unit calculator" allows you to easily

input the drinks that you have had and it can summarise your total unit consumption within seconds to allow you to easily keep track.

I can provide you and any other readers with this invaluable tool if you contact the newspaper via the contact email provided below.

Q What are the potential harmful effects of alcohol on oral health?

A Alcohol is second only to smoking in the list of risk factors for oral cancer.

As further research is being carried out into its effects, the role of alcohol is becoming more apparent.

Cancer Research UK revealed that 37 per cent of mouth and pharyngeal cancers in men and 17 per cent in women were directly linked to alcohol in

2010. People who smoke and drink have an even higher risk of developing an oral cancer, as the two combined has a compounding effect.

Q Which age groups are more prone to developing alcohol related oral cancer?

A There is no specific age group. The latest available statistics have shown that oral cancers are becoming increasingly more prevalent in younger people and this has shown a direct correlation with increased alcohol consumption by the young in recent years.

Q What are the harmful effects of alcohol on teeth and gums?

A Many alcoholic drinks - especially those aimed at younger people and women -

are high in sugars which can directly affect dental decay rates.

All alcoholic drinks contain acid, which over time can have a devastating effect on teeth by causing them to wear down.

The detrimental effect is twofold as the acid consumed will gradually wear the enamel on the surfaces of your teeth and the effect is compounded in some cases by acid-reflux or vomiting as a direct result of drinking alcohol in excess.

In addition, excessive alcohol consumption hinders the body's natural ability to heal, so following dental treatment or oral surgery, the recovery process will usually take longer and your body may not be able to heal completely.

Q I'm becoming increasingly worried about the affects of alcohol and would like help to

try and stop drinking. Where do I start with this?

A As your first step I would advise you to visit your GP, contact a support group, or set a date in the near future to stop.

While some people can stop drinking on their own, others need medical help to manage the physical process of withdrawal.

If you think you have an addiction to alcohol, talk to your GP about whether you need to withdraw from alcohol under medical supervision.

Your GP can provide you with the right medicine that will help you safely withdraw from alcohol. Check your total unit consumption at:

www.dental-excellenceuk.com/education/guidelines-on-alcohol-consumption/

Meet the man with the answers on oral health issues

THE Leicester Mercury has teamed up with Leicestershire dentist Dr Adam Patel (pictured) to help readers with any dental and oral health problems they might have.

People are invited to send in any questions and Dr Patel will answer a selection of them through a regular column on this page, the Leicester Mercury's Monday health section.

Dr Patel said: "I hope I will be able to help people with information and advice which they can put into practice.

"My experience in seeing patients is

that there is quite a lack of dental and oral health information and education.

"Your mouth is the start of your digestive system and people often don't realise there is a distinct link between oral and general health.

"It can also have a big impact on a person's psychological and social wellbeing. Bad oral health is very visible and can impact on aspects of life, from a person's personal life to getting a job."

Dr Patel, who was educated at the City of Leicester School and Sixth

Form College, said: "I hope I will be able to help readers with the information I provide."

Dr Patel's replies should only be used as a reference - he is not a replacement for your own dentist.

If you have a query you would like to raise, please summarise it in about 200 words and e-mail it to the address below.

Put "health questions" in the subject line.

Alternatively, send your 200-word summary to Cathy Buss, Health Questions, Leicester Mercury, St

George Street, Leicester, LE1 9FQ. Please note, an edited version of the information you send us might appear on this page.

Please include a contact name and phone number in case we have any queries about your submission.

These details will not be published.

Dr Patel will not be able to send personal responses to letters.

E-mail:

catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk



Have you struggled with a difficult health problem? We want to tell your story. Contact health correspondent Cathy Buss on 0116 222 4261, e-mail catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk