# TYNYCOED SURGERY HEALTHY LIVING ADVICE LEAFLET

Many of us face challenges from unhealthy life choices which can have a serious impact on our future health. Obesity, smoking and drinking alcohol above recommended limits all lead to significant physical and sometimes mental health problems. Once established, such patterns may be very difficult to change. The good news is that lifestyle changes can make a real difference to your wellbeing and can often reduce the risk of future health problems. This leaflet is intended to give you some information about the health risks of obesity, smoking and alcohol and signpost you to the most helpful support for weight loss, smoking cessation and reducing alcohol intake.

**OBESITY/WEIGHT LOSS**

Obesity is the medical term for being very overweight. If you are overweight or obese this means you are carrying too much body fat. It is measured using the Body Mass Index (BMI) which relates your weight to your height. If your BMI is between 25 and 30 you are overweight; if it is more than 30 you are considered to be obese. Unfortunately, overweight/obese individuals are more at risk of developing other health problems- including Diabetes; Heart Disease; High Blood Pressure; Stroke; many cancers; liver and kidney disease. As a consequence, it reduces life expectancy considerably. Obese people are also known to suffer from low self-esteem, poor self-image and lack of confidence; these may lead on to feelings of isolation and depression.

Losing weight may help to delay or even prevent the onset of obesity-related health issues and, even if you already suffer from problems like Diabetes, High Blood Pressure or High Cholesterol, these are likely to improve as your weight comes down. If your BMI is between 25 and 35, many of the health benefits come from losing the first 5-10% of your starting weight (for example if you weigh 90kg then 5% is 4.5kg and 10% is 9kg). This is good news; it means you do not have to reach an “ideal” weight before you see many of the health benefits from your efforts.

Help is available to support you as you lose weight. Some useful websites are: -

Healthy Weight Wales- <https://www.healthyweight.wales>

CTM Foodwise for Life- <https://ctmuhb.nhs.wales/services/public-health-dietitians/foodwise-for-life/>

Lose weight- Better Health-NHS- <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/>

**SMOKING**

Everyone knows that smoking is bad for you, but the addictive nature of nicotine can make it extremely difficult to quit even if you recognise the need to do so. The facts and figures are frightening: -

-Up to half of all smokers die from smoking-related disease (around 100,000 people a year in the UK). Many smoking-related illnesses can lead to a slow, lingering death.

-Smoking increases the risk of many cancers-lung cancer in particular (8 out of 10 deaths directly linked to smoking) but also cancers of the mouth, throat, voicebox, gullet, pancreas,

bladder, kidney, blood and neck of the womb

-Smoking increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, hardening of the arteries in the legs and aneurysms (swelling of important blood vessels which can burst causing internal bleeding)

-Impotence for men, reduced fertility for both men and women and earlier menopause in women have all been linked to smoking

-Pregnant women who smoke are more likely to suffer a miscarriage, have complications during the pregnancy and have a baby with a low birth weight. The risk of having a stillbirth or a baby dying in the first week of life is increased by about a third in smokers.

-Nicotine withdrawal symptoms can include cravings, anxiety, irritability, dizziness,

constipation and impaired concentration.

There are many other harmful effects, and these can extend to people who live with smokers (the “passive smoking” effect).

So, smoking is deadly, and quitting can be very difficult. The good news is that successfully stopping has immediate and long-lasting benefits. Your risk of developing serious disease reduces no matter what age you quit. If you stop smoking before the age of 50 you reduce your risk of dying from smoking-related illness by 50%, but even if you already have COPD or heart disease the outlook is much improved if you quit. The likelihood of developing one of the previously-listed conditions is significantly reduced and the risk to non-smokers who live with you is removed (particularly important for children). You will look younger, save a large amount of money, and no longer smell of stale tobacco.

Quitting smoking is difficult and challenging . Do not be disheartened or put off if you have had previous unsuccessful attempts-many smokers make several attempts before finally quitting for good. It is important to choose your moment to quit-away from any particularly stressful current or upcoming events which may tempt you to reach for the cigarette packet-and be committed to the process from the very start. Help is available from a range of sources and Nicotine Replacement Therapy can be extremely helpful in reducing the worst withdrawal effects when you quit.

The recommended “one-stop” website for assistance when you decide to stop smoking is: -

Help me quit/Stop Smoking Services in Wales- <https://www.helpmequit.wales>

Freephone number 0800 085 2219

**ALCOHOL**

Many of us enjoy drinking alcohol in moderation but unfortunately for some people alcohol consumption may reach levels that are harmful to both physical and mental health. There are four levels of alcohol consumption when considering the effects on the human body; these are Low Risk, Hazardous, Harmful and Dependent/Addicted. Alcohol dependence or addiction is the most destructive situation, but you can suffer the harmful effects of alcohol without reaching this stage-this is “problem drinking”. Almost 1 in 4 adults in the UK drink more than the “safe” level. Even if you are not addicted, heavy drinking is a serious health risk. Amongst the many harmful effects of alcohol are: -

-Alcohol related liver problems such as fatty liver, hepatitis and cirrhosis (which can itself be lethal or can lead on to liver cancer)

-Cancers of the mouth, throat, voicebox, gullet, colon and breast

-Stomach disorders

-Pancreatitis, a severe and potentially life-threatening inflammation of the pancreas gland.

-Cardiomyopathy, a severe and permanent damage of heart muscle which can lead to heart failure

-Mental health problems including depression, anxiety and memory disorders

-Impotence

-High Blood pressure

-Foetal Alcohol Syndrome-damage to the developing baby if alcohol is consumed during pregnancy

Drinking alcohol also increases your chances of injury or death by accidental means-for example about 1 in 7 road deaths are caused by drinking alcohol. And of course, if you are drinking heavily this can have major implications for your family-it is estimated that 3 in 10 divorces, 4 in 10 cases of domestic violence and 2 in 10 cases of child abuse are alcohol-related.

Alcohol intake is measured in “units of alcohol”. One unit of alcohol is roughly equal to half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider and there are one and a half units in a small glass of wine or a standard measure of spirits-but “strong” beers or wines will have a much higher unit count for the same volume as their weaker counterparts. Many bottles and cans display an advisory regarding their alcohol content and there are apps available which allow you to accurately calculate your alcohol intake.

Drinking 14 units of alcohol or less a week is currently considered low risk, as long as this is spread over three or more days out of the seven with several days free from alcohol entirely. If you exceed 14 units, you are entering the “hazardous drinking” category which increases health risks from alcohol and can lead on to “harmful drinking” where health problems or damaging effects on work and home life will be seen. Ultimately this can lead to alcohol dependence/addiction which results in a strong urge to drink, a need to drink more and more alcohol to feel the same effects and unpleasant, potentially dangerous withdrawal effects which can include feeling sick, uncontrollable shaking, sweating and even convulsions/seizures.

Having read the above, you may feel that currently you are drinking within recommended “safe” limits, or you may recognise that you have or are developing a problem that needs to be addressed. Coming to terms with this and accepting you need help is a huge step towards sorting out the problem. If you have been drinking heavily for a long time and/or feel you may be alcohol dependent, it is extremely important that you do not stop drinking alcohol suddenly as this can lead to severe, sometimes dangerous withdrawal effects. The NHS website Drink Less-Better Health is an excellent resource for advice on reducing your alcohol intake and can be accessed on: -

<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/drink-less/>

Other useful contact numbers are: -

DASPA (Drug and Alcohol Single Point of Access)- 0300 333 0000-this is the first and single point of contact number for people looking for support or advice regarding drug and alcohol misuse and is a collaboration between the voluntary, social and health sectors.

DAN 24/7 (Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline)- 0808 808 2234-free telephone help and advice.

If you prefer to discuss your concerns with a doctor, please contact the surgery to make an appointment.