

## Health & Well-being

RoodlaneMedical  
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### \*\*Newsflash\*\*

From 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017 you can book GP appointments at any of our clinics online! If you haven't already, register here to book online:

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## Dr Gill's Blog



When I opened the newspaper recently I saw two stories.

AA Gill has died at 62 of smoking related (60 a day until he was 48) small

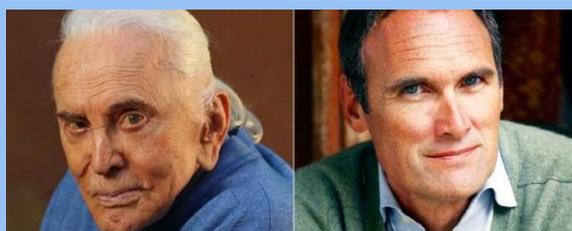
cell lung cancer. And Kirk Douglas is 100 years old.

AA Gill's last article published in the Times on December 11<sup>th</sup> is as incisive and thought-provoking as his broadcasts about his illness. He called himself AA (his real initials) in tribute to Alcoholics Anonymous who saved him from addiction. He has been an incredible writer and his determination to use his skill with words to share his experience is extraordinary. In the same edition of the Times, there are accolades to Kirk Douglas who had reached 100 and led a colourful life. That said of course, there is evidence to suggest that regular sex does improve your longevity and he certainly had a reputation for that.

I found myself asking, did Kirk Douglas smoke or drink. Douglas' father died of lung cancer at 72. Kirk himself claims to have

stop, which he did "cold turkey". He later claimed that he did as his father had done and kept a cigarette on him which he took out from time to time when he felt the urge and then asked himself "who is stronger", him or the cigarette and put it back in his pocket.

I admit I also smoked for 4 years in my early 20s and stopped by putting my last pack in a post box. I hope the postman didn't start as a result! So Douglas did accumulate some risk but not as much as AA Gill. Did he drink? A quick search didn't find the answer to that one but I would guess probably not heavily given that, despite a stroke, he still has reasonable intellectual function and has lived to be 100.



My heart went out to AA Gill and his friends and family and I want to pay tribute to his courage in sharing his story which he

been determined not to smoke but he did start in 1946 on a movie set when they wanted him to smoke in a particular scene.

He smoked for 4 years until 1950 which is about the time that the link between smoking and lung cancer was becoming widely accepted and then he made a decision to

announced as having “the full English” (as in a breakfast – he was a restaurant critic) of cancer in an article 3 weeks before he died. Other people who are sharing their stories include Ben Stiller on the subject of prostate cancer. 1 in 2 of us will get cancer – we need to make it less taboo and talk about how to avoid it and how to survive it, even how to accept it, openly.

## Looking after your Lifestyle

### A little Christmas spirit?

'Tis the season to be jolly' and with that comes invitations to work, friends and family functions. Whether business or pleasure, it's in no doubt there's more socialising to be done and with that, a potential increase in the amount of alcohol we consume.

Whilst it may feel like we're being sociable and getting into the festive mood, let's not forget the risks involved in having more frequent 'tipples' and the longer term impacts of increased and more regular drinking.

Did you know that alcohol is linked to over 60 medical conditions? It's one of the three biggest lifestyle risk factors after smoking and obesity. This year, Alcohol Awareness Week (14-20 November) focussed on the theme 'Know the risks', encouraging us to learn more about our intake and the impact alcohol has on our health.

Whilst some find alcohol a nice way to relax and unwind, we mustn't lose sight of the risks long term drinking can do to our health. This year, new guidelines for alcohol consumption, produced by UK Chief Medical Officers, warn that drinking any level of alcohol can increase the risk of a range of cancers. A review from the Committee of Carcinogenicity (CoC) support this in their [2015 statement](#) on the consumption of alcoholic beverages and risk of cancer. Frequent use of alcohol in the longer term can increase the risk of cancers of the lip, tongue, throat, stomach, pancreas and colon not to mention



If you are entertaining or fancy a festive tittle, be mindful of how much you are drinking. Alcohol consumption on an empty stomach interferes with blood sugar levels, reducing available glucose to the brain, raises cortisol levels and other stress hormones in the bloodstream. It's worth avoiding alcohol on an empty stomach! You could alternate an alcoholic drink with a soft drink, your body will thank you for it- particularly the morning after! You could also track your intake. The NHS provides a [drinks tracker](#) which is a great way to monitor your volumes and also helps ensure you don't slip into bad habits in the longer term.

Enjoy the holiday season, eat, drink and be merry but mindful!

Wishing you all a healthy, happy and wonderful New Year!

the impact this has on our heart, liver and weight.

## Doctors Corner

*"I went to my doctor for a cough and he/she wasn't keen to prescribe antibiotics, and I don't see why. The only reason I would have any concern is not being able to drink during the festive season!"*

We approach the time of feasting and good cheer, when a healthy lifestyle of good diet, exercise, and moderation in alcohol seems to be forgotten for a while. It can also be a time of coughs, colds and flu, just when people want to be well. Surely a quick course of antibiotics is the ideal answer? Half a century ago this was the magic bullet that saved lives, particularly in otherwise healthy people who might be dead in a week from pneumonia or some other infection.



### **Why not to take antibiotics**

We know antibiotics work only against bacteria, not against viruses (which cause the common cold, flu, and most coughs and sore throats). Even bacterial infections which are mild can be dealt with by the body's own immune system without the need for antibiotics.

Nevertheless, antibiotics are overprescribed, about half the time being inappropriately used. Over 40 million courses are dispensed annually in the UK.

Side effects may include diarrhoea, cramps and other abdominal symptoms, rashes, and allergies, sometimes severe. We don't want to cause illness by giving something which is likely to be of little or no benefit. More than this, in an example of evolution in action, the susceptible bacteria in the body get killed (even the innocent non-disease-causing bystanders), while those less susceptible thrive and become resistant. This resistance can be passed to other bacteria, and to other people, resulting in an infection that is difficult to treat, such as the notorious MRSA or C.diff. In an automatic process, but one that seems cunning and deliberate, the resistance can spread in a society or country, leaving it defenceless against the invisible army. The current death toll from these "superbugs" is 25,000 people a year in Europe.

### **The future**

Nightmare scenarios are illustrated, where we become powerless to treat most infections, with rapid death becoming more common again, most surgery dangerous and transplant surgery and cancer treatment impossible due to infection. This is replacing nuclear concerns, global warming, and asteroid impacts as one of the main (and more likely) threats to humankind. Hostile artificial intelligence is losing its place to organisms of zero intelligence. The government is making policy for it. A simple bed side test may soon be used

to help distinguish bacterial infection from viral, by testing for a tell-tale sign of inflammation called CRP (C-reactive protein), if costs can be brought down, but in the meantime we need to rely on the doctor's best judgement and the patient's understanding of the risk and so not pressurising for more. There is still the chance that the antibiotic era of less than a century may be simply a brief historic curiosity.

### How to help

- Don't ask for antibiotics.
- If you do take antibiotics, complete the course, don't miss tablets, don't give it to someone else and don't take from someone else.
- Finally, most antibiotics are safe to be used with alcohol used in moderation - as long as you remember to take them! Simply check with your doctor or pharmacist.



### Do you have a health related question?

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