

Health & Well-being

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Dr Gill's Blog



It would be hard not to be moved by the deaths of Carrie Fisher and her mother Debbie Reynolds.

Carrie Fisher's health was haunted by her bipolar

disorder and a long history of drug and alcohol abuse. She paid a heavy price for her mental illness and her lifestyle. Through the course of her life she spoke openly, frankly and inspiringly about her experiences in a way that helped others, as indeed her death has done by bringing it so poignantly back into the public eye.

For a number of reasons bipolar disorder is associated with a decreased life expectancy, in the region of 10 years less than other people. In Carrie's case her other associated illnesses (co-morbidities) and addiction also contributed to her early death. Her mother, Debbie Reynolds, died just one day after her daughter after saying "I want to be with Carrie".

Can you actually die of a broken heart? Can the strain of a massive emotional event affect the heart to that degree? The condition, which is real, is called stress cardiomyopathy. Under extreme emotional strain the body is flooded with cortisol and adrenaline amongst other things and can effectively stun the heart muscle. In Japan the syndrome has another name - Takotsubo syndrome - which is derived for the name of a Japanese fishing trap. The reason being that on scans the

In one study published two years ago in the American journal JAMA Internal Medicine, the data looking at thousands of people showed that the risk of dying of a heart attack or stroke in the month after a loved one died was doubled.

There is little that we can take from this other than that love hurts and that our hearts do seem to be in some way entwined with our feelings.

If you or someone close to you has suffered a bereavement it is important to have a calming environment and as much love and support as possible particularly in the first few weeks.



The other big headline at the moment is Dry January. I am one of the growing number of people who do take a complete rest from alcohol during the month of January which of course makes it easier because it is now common enough to be socially acceptable which reduces the pressure to drink in social situations.

most important pumping chamber of the heart appears to have changed shape to resemble the fishing trap.

What actually happens is that part of the heart temporarily enlarges and does not pump effectively. In speculating how this might have been relevant to Debbie Reynolds it is possible for blood clots to form in a dilated left ventricle which can then be pushed into the circulation causing a stroke. Of course I don't know if that is actually what happened to Debbie Reynolds but it is a possible explanation.

The great news is that there is evidence to show that people who participate in dry January have an overall lower alcohol intake through the remainder of the year compared with those who do not.

Looking after your Lifestyle

Have you taken the plunge and gone dry for January?

Last month we focussed on how the festive season can influence your behaviours and result in the over-consumption of alcohol. We offered some useful information to help you keep track of your intake and stay in control or your alcohol consumption over the festive season and beyond.

SO the big question is- Have you started off 2017 with a booze-free bang or a banging headache?

Switch off the beer tap and turn on the water! Dry January has been the topic of conversation for many with a renewed focus and energy around healthy living and the great rewards this comes with.

Let's take a look at the benefits of going 'dry'

- No more waking in the middle of the night feeling like you've trekked across the Sahara desert!
- feeling your skin is hydrated and clearer.
- Improved sleep patterns (no more falling asleep on the sofa!)
- No more fuzzy heads
- Your eating habits are improved and you have more energy



A new test – **Fibroscan®** – is now available to check for liver damage. A simple, non-invasive process, the test is performed in around 15 minutes using an 'elastography' method (similar to that of ultrasound)

Fibrosis is measured by using an ultrasound probe on the surface of skin and involves 'flicking the organ' with a vibration to see how the liver responds. The results can measure signs of damage, inflammation and scarring through the stiffness of the liver and how the organ responds to the test.

What better time than the new year to take charge of your health and prioritise the positive changes you would like to make.

For those who may benefit, we are pleased

- Experiencing weight loss and may also see a reduction in blood pressure and cholesterol
- Improved concentration and mood
- The money you'll save!

Let's remind ourselves, around 20% of drinkers will develop liver problems which could ultimately prove fatal. Such is the concern around this that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) proposed all heavy drinkers should have a scan to screen for liver disease

to offer our clients a discounted rate for a **Fibroscan®** of £350 (usually £420)

Start off on the right foot by getting a health screen or visiting your GP to discuss any concerns or support you may require.

Doctors Corner

Dear Doctor

I have been smoking for over 10 years and have decided that 2017 is the year I am going to stop for good. I have tried to stop a few times in the past but have always started up again.

Do you have any advice?



Firstly I would like to support you in your decision. Stopping smoking is known to be a significant intervention with respect to improving your health and protecting against chronic disease.

By stopping smoking you reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease; after 15 years your risk falls to that of someone who never smoked. You also lower your risk of stroke, cancer (including those affecting the respiratory tract, oesophagus, and bladder), chronic lung disease, asthma and respiratory infections and gastric ulcer disease, amongst others.

Cigarette smoking is a major cause of premature death in the UK. If you can stop before the age of 35 years your risk of dying is not that different to those who never smoked.

Equally you will reap the benefits in the present. You should notice a general improvement in energy levels and wellbeing once you move through the transitional period of stopping. Additional benefits are clearer skin, fresher breath and whiter teeth. Not to mention a boost to fertility and your bank balance from the savings you make.

The hardest part is to make the change until you no longer consider yourself a smoker. This time period is variable but there can come a time when you won't miss it.

Steps to take to quitting

1. Know your triggers-why are you a smoker?

Common theme- I enjoy it, it helps me relax, I smoke when I'm stressed or upset, it gives me five minutes to take time out, it gets me out of the office, it helps me to think, I smoke when I go out with my friends and have a drink.

What kind of smoker are you? Knowing this will help you avoid certain situations in the early days, plan pre-emptively or think of alternative coping strategies- Eg if you are upset talk to a friend, if you need space to think use Mindfulness or meditation techniques , if a situation is making you anxious is there a better way of facing it head on?

2. Start thinking positively - instead of focusing on what you have to lose think about what you have to gain. There will be an empty space when you give up. Now is the time to fill it with a habit that strengthens and supports you. I normally recommend sport or exercise. This enables you to redirect your energy into maximising fitness, your performance will be enhanced as you quit, this will help curb weight gain and improve mood by releasing tension in a healthy way. Think about what you like doing and start now.

3. Reach out for support- one of the common reasons why people fail is temptation in the early stages. Ask your partner to stop at the same time and quit together, ask your friends to avoid offering you cigarettes, avoid high risk social functions where alcohol may weaken your resolve.

4. Seek professional advice- your doctor or a stop smoking counsellor can talk you through strategies to improve your chance of staying quit. These include discussion around why you should stop, planning a quit date or weaning down gradually, referral to a stop smoking service and advice on drug therapy.

5. Drug therapy includes Nicotine Replacement Therapy NRT (patches/gum/lozenge's/mouth spray/nasal spray/inhalation cartridges/sublingual tablets) or prescription medication (Varenicline or Bupropion) Depending on your preference and medical history a particular method may be more suitable. Certain groups such as younger people, or if pregnant or breastfeeding. will be more limited in their options. A combination of treatments may work best. Drugs are most helpful when given with behavioural support.

6. The first E-cigarette has now been licenced as a medicinal product, to be used as a smoking cessation aid. E-cigarettes contain a solution containing nicotine that can be inhaled. They can be used to aid smoking cessation but NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) advises that all smokers should be supported to stop completely. At present there is still some debate on the place and safety of E-cigarettes in smoking and smoking cessation.

7. Stay motivated- there is a wealth of information on-line, register for regular text/email alerts or enrol on a course to help you maintain abstinence.

8. How to stay quit. It doesn't matter if you slip up. Remember you can start again, it doesn't

mean you have failed. Tomorrow is another day and every day without smoking takes you closer to your goal of becoming a non-smoker. The benefits are far too great to give up now. Stay Strong and stay quit!

This months Doctor's Corner was provided by Roodlane GP Dr Millie Saha.



Do you have a health related question?

Why not try emailing us in confidence and you could see your question answered by a qualified Doctor in our next newsletter!

Email: DoctorsQuestions@roodlane.co.uk

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