

Teenage drinking

Doctors are worried about an apparent increase in the number of young teenagers who are drinking heavily.

While many of the more serious health effects of drinking affect those who have been drinking for many years, it is feared that alcohol abuse during the formative years sets a pattern for later life.

The British Medical Association (BMA) published a report highlighting these fears last year.

"Alcohol and Young People" suggested that not only was there a general rise in the proportion of 11 to 15-year-olds who drink alcohol regularly, but also that there is an increase in the amount they are drinking on each occasion.

Alcohol Concern suggested that a third more 11-15 year olds are drinking regularly.

It is far easier to work out the health effects of drinking on adults - it is known that heavy drinking over the years is a risk factor for certain cancers, particularly oral and liver, and raised blood pressure which can contribute to heart disease.

"Binge" drinking every now and then tends to be far more harmful to health than drinking a moderate amount occasionally.

It has also been suggested that teenagers are more likely to have casual sex if they are regular drinkers.

Doctors think that this effect could be far more pronounced in the young, as alcohol will tend to have more effect on their developing bodies.

The increase in the availability of "designer drinks", the so-called "alcopops" has been accused of making alcohol far more attractive to younger people. Research has shown that it is particularly the 13-16 age group that is attracted to the idea of alcopops.

A spokesman for the BMA said: "There is a need for government action to address the problems of underage and teenage drinking.

"This must involve changes to legislation, responsible marketing, effective monitoring of the drinks industry and health education."

In Scotland, it is an offence for anyone under 18 to buy alcohol for a person under 18 years old - the BMA would like to see that legislation introduced in England and Wales.

It also called for:

- Tougher regulation of advertising for alcoholic drinks by the Independent Television Commission and the Advertising Standards Authority**
- The creation of an independent regulator with powers of enforcement to review complaints about marketing practices**
- More spot-checks on retailers using "test purchases" by under 18s**
- Extension of current voluntary proof-of-age ID schemes**
- More alcohol education to be introduced from primary school level**

The Portman Group, which sets standards for advertising within the alcohol industry, has taken steps to prevent it appealing to young teenagers. This week, it announced a ban on the use of words such as "revitalising" in connection with drinks which contain a stimulant such as caffeine as well as alcohol.

Adapted from:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/821883.stm>

Another useful

website:<http://www.yourteenager.co.uk/dealing-with-teen-drinking.html>