



# Dr. MAX THE MIND DOCTOR

## NHS psychiatrist Max Pemberton may make you rethink your life

**H**AVE you found yourself reaching for a soothing glass of wine or three, or a hefty gin and tonic each night during lockdown?

While there's nothing wrong with enjoying a tippie, several of my patients, and even some of my friends have said how since the lockdown has begun, they've found themselves drinking more than usual.

As a letter to a newspaper put it this week: 'Please open the pubs again before we all turn into alcoholics!'

Latest figures show alcohol sales have increased by almost 300 per cent during the pandemic as drinking at home has become the only alternative to socialising over a pint or bottle of wine in a pub, bar or restaurant. Even those who under normal circumstances would never dream of drinking alone admit to a comforting glass.

And of course it is understandable. If you are working from home, then a drink is an easy way to draw a line under the working day.

Those who are stressed about the pandemic — fearful of falling ill or worried about the economic fallout — may find solace and relaxation in alcohol, or it can seem that way.

But there are risks — and suddenly it's a habit you can't quit.

Doctors are concerned this period of isolation might lead to addiction in at-risk individuals or to relapse in recovered addicts, placing further strain on drug and alcohol services — and the health service in general.

Indeed, this could develop into yet more 'collateral damage' caused by the pandemic in the months and years, to come.

In recent weeks, I've had several people tell me they're worried how their own drinking — or that of their partner — has increased.

If this strikes a chord, my advice is to face up to the problem on a personal level or, if it's a partner, family member or friend, then initiate a conversation — so here's my guide to this sensitive subject.

**1. Timing is key.** Don't discuss it when the person is drinking or drunk. It's tough, I know, but far better to wait until they are sober and you are both calm.

**2. Start sentences with 'I'.** Too many arguments turn into screaming accusations of: 'You did this' and 'You did that'. All it does is make them person defensive.

Try the following sentence formula: 'I feel ...' (say how you feel), 'when ...' (calmly describe their behaviour) 'because ...' (describe the effect of their



**THE pandemic has seen unsung heroes of the NHS having their day at last. Nurses and healthcare assistants particularly are in the spotlight, as they step out of their comfort zones to help manage Covid-19 patients. Many senior doctors who've spent years in managerial**

**roles or have come out of retirement have been redeployed to the wards, and they're bowled over by the skills on display, including those of non-medical staff. It's completely shaken their old-fashioned 'officer class' attitude of doctors vs the rest. About time too!**

behaviour on you, other people or themselves).

**3. Assess where they are at.** Someone in the full throes of addiction is very different to a person teetering on the brink. In the latter case, he or she might know they have a problem and be secretly pleased it's been noticed.

Someone who is addicted may also be aware of their problem but fearful of stopping. Be prepared for a negative reaction.

**4. Keep it short.** Having brief but multiple chats gives someone time to mull things over. By the

second or third conversation, you might find they're more amenable to the idea of getting help. But...

**5. Don't expect change overnight.** Be absolutely firm about what is unacceptable behaviour — aggression or violence — but be flexible, too. If the drinking continues, it doesn't mean you've failed. Just continue to offer support without dictating what they should do.

**6. Focus on the present.** Don't dredge up what's happened in the distant past or dwell on things the person has done or said when drunk. Stick to the problem at

hand and what you can *both* do. And don't forget to...

**7. Listen.** A person is more likely to confide in you if you don't constantly interrupt or criticise. You can ask questions, but make them open-ended — ask 'why', 'how', and 'what if'?

But if *you* are finding it difficult to talk ...

**8. Write a letter.** Some people find it difficult to express themselves verbally. Writing allows you to take your time and organise your thoughts. Share your letter and suggest a follow up conversation when you're *both* ready.

**9. Encourage them to speak to a professional.** If someone is addicted to alcohol, then stopping cold turkey can be dangerous. A GP will assess and decide if medication is needed to safely wean them off alcohol.

**10. Get support.** Charities such as Adfam or Al-Anon help families affected by drugs or alcohol. Further resources are available on the NHS website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)).

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**We're so grateful for your support**

I AM so incredibly proud of working for this newspaper which has helped source and deliver an incredible 20 tons of vital personal protection equipment (PPE) worth £1m to healthcare workers on the coronavirus frontline in hospitals and care homes via a new Daily Mail-backed charity, Mail Force.

And of course I am proud of its readers, too, who are supporting the charity's endeavour. To date, donations have reached £5 million.

I can't emphasise enough how much this means to us. In the hospital trust where I work many members of staff have fallen sick with Covid-19 and one colleague has sadly died.

Of course, it's down to the NHS managers and the Government to ensure we're adequately protected and, quite frankly, they should be ashamed of themselves for the dire shortage of PPE.

Confronted with so many sick and scared patients, clinical staff can often feel alone in all this. But the support of Mail Force reminds healthcare workers that we really *are* all in this together and that all of *you* are rooting for us. So, an enormous thank you, because it means the world.

## Fight flab to help the NHS

RESEARCHERS at Liverpool University and Imperial College London this week confirmed a suspected link between obesity and deaths from the Covid-19 virus. Obese people hospitalised with the virus are 37 per cent more likely to die than slimmer patients.

Only people with dementia are more at risk than obese patients, with death rates at 39 per cent. This study is the first to conclusively show what doctors have known for several months — obesity is a major risk factor for more severe symptoms.

If this isn't enough to motivate us all — as individuals and as a nation — to deal with the obesity epidemic, I don't know what is. If you're overweight and love the NHS, it's your duty to fix your diet and start exercising. No excuses.

## DR MAX PRESCRIBES...

### A VIRTUAL RETREAT

YOU might not be able to escape to a spa any time soon, so why not bring it to you? Turn your living room into a haven by logging on to Euphoria, a luxury sanctuary in Sparta, Greece, which has launched a free, online spa retreat. You can try a series of healing and uplifting activities, such as yoga and mindfulness, to help you deal with stress. You'll soon forget you're in lockdown and imagine you're on a beach instead. [www.euphoriaretreat.com/webinars](http://www.euphoriaretreat.com/webinars)

## Dapper Tom gives us a smart lesson

**WHAT an inspiration Captain Tom Moore — or should I say Colonel Tom now — is!**

Not only has the 100-year-old war veteran raised over £32m (and counting!) for the NHS, but he has managed to look effortlessly dapper while doing so, whether he'd doing laps of his garden on his Zimmer or being interviewed.

We should all take note. Appearance can provide a



valuable insight into one's mental state.

Often, when someone is sliding into depression, they stop bothering with personal care. One professor of psychiatry I used to work for would say

that he really started to worry about his patients when they stopped brushing their hair.

A slovenly, scruffy appearance can impact on our moods — especially in lockdown.

So let's take Colonel Tom as our role model. Ditch the trackie bottoms and hoodies covered in toast crumbs, please, and spruce up. You'll feel instantly better.