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### **Experts help drinkers control the Christmas craving**

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#### Experts help drinkers control the Christmas craving

Festive Season drinkers who feel they are losing control of their alcohol consumption can join an innovative drug-free program run by researchers at The University of Queensland.

Professor David Kavanagh of UQ's School of Medicine is piloting a program that is free for participants and particularly useful for people who find that their drinking is damaging other areas of their lives.

The program involves "owning and managing" your alcohol craving, rather than fighting it, Professor Kavanagh said.

"For most of us there is nothing wrong with small or moderate amounts of alcohol," he said.

"However, at least once a year 35 percent of Australians drink in a way that puts them at short-term risk of physical harm.

"Alarming, 40 percent of teenagers aged 14-19 and 61 percent of 20-29 year-olds risk their health in this way.

"For many, Christmas-New Year is a really perilous time because it is easy to lose track of alcohol consumption when you are out partying."

Professor Kavanagh said the program, at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital at Herston, is designed for people who want to stop drinking altogether, as well as those who want to cut back.

"It is never easy to kick a habit like drinking, especially when we are surrounded by alcohol and images that promote drinking.

"More than half of problem drinkers who try to control their habit fall back into problem drinking in the first three months. There are now some drugs that help with craving for alcohol, and make it easier to stay in control.

"At UQ, we are tackling craving for alcohol with a new approach that does not use drugs.

"The treatment is based on laboratory research about the nature of craving, and how it can be controlled.

"We teach people how to use methods such as easy meditation and relaxation techniques to deal with craving and stay in control of their drinking.

"People interested in this program should call 1300 300 164 to leave a message or talk to one of our staff."

Professor Kavanagh said many people are unaware of what constitutes a risky level of

drinking.

“Women who have an average of more than two standard drinks a day, and men having more than four a day risk long-term health problems – especially if they do not have at least two “dry” days each week.

“Having a little more than this occasionally may not be a problem for most people, provided they are not driving or doing other potentially dangerous things like swimming.

“However, more than 4 drinks on any day for women, and more than 6 for men puts people at risk.

“One in 10 Australians is dicing with ill health by regularly exceeding these limits.

“Other things to look for are problems that drinking has caused—problems at work, or at home. For example: losing your driver’s license; being robbed or assaulted; or getting into financial strife.

“It is important to do something about problem drinking before it causes something you can’t easily fix—like losing your job, your friends, or your marriage.”

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