

Could Amazon's Alexa help you cut down on your drinking?

November 14 2017, by Katie Edmunds



Credit: Cancer Research UK

It can tell you the time, read you the news and even crack a joke or two, but could Amazon's Alexa play a role in your health too?

Alexa is one of a growing number of voice technologies that are slowly becoming part of people's everyday lives. Most smartphones have some form of voice assistant, and 'hands-free' speakers such as the Amazon

Echo and Google Home Mini have become increasingly common in homes around the world.

We've [blogged about this growing trend already](#), and how we're exploring [voice technology](#) as a possible new way to reach people.

One area we want to explore is whether voice technology could help people make changes to their lifestyle that could improve their health. And today, tied to Alcohol Awareness Week, we're launching an [alcohol tracker](#) that can be used with Alexa-compatible devices.

What has voice technology got to do with our health?

Several Alexa skills, which are essentially apps for Alexa devices, have been launched in the US with healthcare in mind. They range from one that can help parents check the severity of their [child's fever](#), to [another](#) that can help the elderly keep in touch with their support and care network. And the ideas being tested are endless. Could voice technology help patients complete registration forms in hospital waiting rooms, or record a doctor's notes during an examination?

It's early days, and there are no clear answers yet on where voice might work best. But it's easy to see that this kind of technology has the potential to have a real impact in the world of health and wellbeing.

Given that the stage looks set for voice to become a major player in how we use technology to communicate in the future, we wanted to find out if Alexa could help people access health and cancer-related information. To test this, we've developed an alcohol tracker for Alexa-enabled devices, such as the Amazon Echo or Dot, called My Alcohol Tracker.

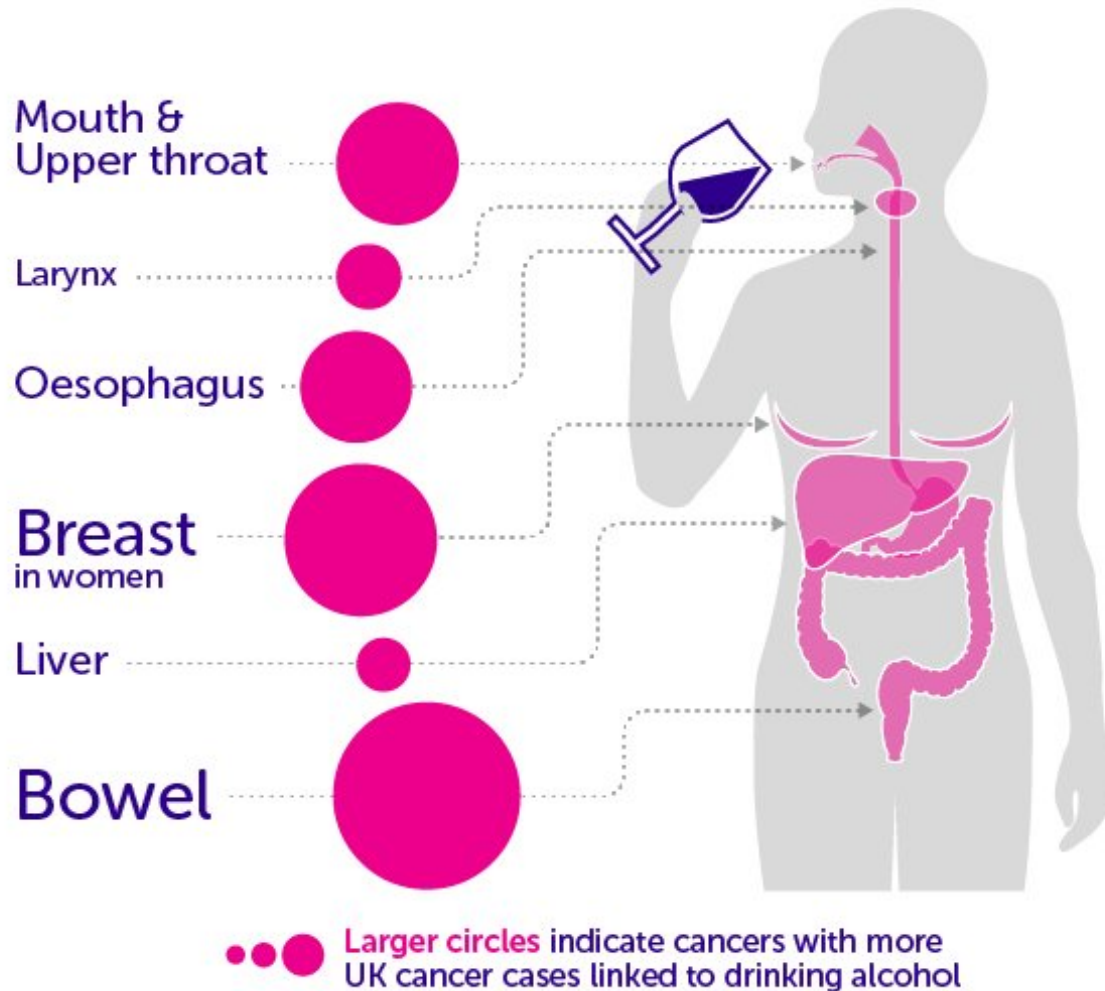
Why would I want to track my alcohol?

It's well known that alcohol can lead to a sore head in the morning, but awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer is [worryingly low](#). Drinking alcohol increases the risk of 7 different types of cancer, including some of the most common types, such as breast and bowel cancer. But the good news is the less you drink, the lower the risk of cancer, which means cutting down even a little bit can make a difference to your health.

Whether it's a glass of wine in front of the telly, or a couple of beers after work with friends, it's easy for the amount we drink to stack up throughout the week without us realising. To keep health risks from alcohol low, it's recommended that we drink no more than 14 units a week – that's about 7 pints of 3-4% beer or 6 standard glasses of wine. And the guidance is the same for everyone, no matter your build, height or gender.

Research is helping us delve into the psychology behind the things we do and what techniques could help change people's behaviour. Understanding how to help people live more healthily is complicated, but one [method](#) that has often set people on the right course is self-monitoring, or tracking.

ALCOHOL CAN CAUSE SEVEN TYPES OF CANCER



Drinking less alcohol could **prevent 12,800 cancer cases** per year in the UK

Credit: Cancer Research UK

It can be a helpful first step in understanding your habits, or what influences your choices – conscious or otherwise, such as realising that

you only reach for a glass of wine when you're stressed, or snacking every time you sit down to watch TV.

What can My Alcohol Tracker do?

You can use My Alcohol Tracker to:

- Add drinks to your weekly total
- Set yourself a personal goal to drink no more than a certain amount (you can use the recommended guidelines of no more than 14 units a week or pick a limit of your own).
- Get a summary of how you're doing this week

Along the way, we've also included information on the number of calories you're drinking as well as hints and tips on ways to cut down.

We recently took My Alcohol Tracker to some of our shops and asked our customers to give it a go.

HOW MANY UNITS ARE IN YOUR DRINK?



WE WILL BEAT CANCER SOONER
cruk.org



Credit: Cancer Research UK

No Alexa? No problem

You can find all the same information that My Alcohol Tracker provides on our website, in our leaflets, through our nurse helpline and out on the streets with our Cancer Awareness Roadshows. So if you don't use voice technology, you definitely won't miss out. And there are lots of other ways to keep an eye on what you're drinking, including mobile apps, websites and good old fashioned pen and paper.

Can voice technology really make a difference?

At the moment, voice recognition devices may just seem like toys for the more techy among us. But in time, this technology has the potential to help us overcome some of the challenges we face with written leaflets or websites.

With its ease of use, and no need to fiddle around with handheld devices, [voice](#) could also be a valuable aid for people with visual impairments or certain physical disabilities – such as limited mobility or dexterity. It could also help people access and understand information if reading lots of text isn't for them, offering something that better suits their needs.

If you have an Alexa-enabled device and would like to try and cut down on [alcohol](#), give Cancer Research UK's My Alcohol Tracker a try. You can [enable it for free from the Amazon Skill Store](#), and leave reviews and comments to help us learn more about this [technology](#) and develop it further.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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