

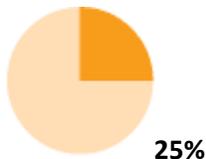
Alcohol Screening and Counseling



At least 38 million adults in the US drink too much.



Only 1 in 6 adults talk with their doctor, nurse, or other health professional about their drinking.



Alcohol screening and brief counseling can reduce the amount consumed on an occasion by 25% in those who drink too much.

At least 38 million adults drink too much and most are not alcoholics. Drinking too much includes binge drinking, high weekly use, and any alcohol use by pregnant women or those under age 21. It causes about 88,000 deaths in the US each year, and costs the economy about \$224 billion. Alcohol screening and brief counseling can reduce drinking on an occasion by 25% in people who drink too much, but only 1 in 6 people has ever talked with their doctor or other health professional about alcohol use. Talking with a patient about their drinking is the first step of screening and brief counseling, which involves:

- Using a set of questions to screen all patients for how much and how often they drink.
- Counseling patients about the health dangers of drinking too much, including women who are (or might be) pregnant.
- Referring only those few patients who need specialized treatment for alcohol dependence.

Doctors and other health professionals can use alcohol screening and brief counseling to help people who are drinking too much to drink less. The Affordable Care Act requires new health insurance plans to cover this service without a co-payment.



Problem

Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals should screen all adult patients and counsel those who drink too much.

Most adults have not talked with a doctor, nurse, or other health professional about how much they drink.

- Drinking too much is dangerous and can lead to heart disease, breast cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancy, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, sudden infant death syndrome, motor-vehicle crashes, and violence.
- Public health experts recommend alcohol screening and counseling should happen more often than it does. Yet, people report a doctor, nurse, or other health professional has rarely talked with them about alcohol, the important first step for addressing problems with drinking too much:
 - Only 1 in 6 adults have discussed their drinking.
 - Few binge drinkers (1 in 4) have talked about alcohol use. Binge drinking is defined as men drinking 5 or more alcoholic drinks or women drinking 4 or more, in about 2-3 hours.
 - Even among adults who binge drink 10 times or more a month, only 1 in 3 have discussed drinking.
 - Only 17% of pregnant women have talked about drinking.
 - Most states had less than 1 in 4 adults who discussed their drinking. Washington, D.C. had the highest percentage with 25%.

Alcohol screening and brief counseling has been proven to work.

- It can reduce how much alcohol a person drinks on an occasion by 25%.
- It improves health and saves money just as blood pressure screening, flu vaccines, and cholesterol or breast cancer screening.
- It is recommended for all adults, including pregnant women.

About 38 million adults in the US drink too much
Only 1 in 6 has talked about it with a health professional



For men, binge drinking is **5 or more drinks** consumed on one occasion*



For women, binge drinking is **4 or more drinks** consumed on one occasion*

*One occasion = within 2 to 3 hours



For men – **15 or more drinks** on average per week

One Drink = 5-ounces of wine, 12-ounces of beer, or 1 ½-ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits or liquor



For women – **8 or more drinks** on average per week

Drinking too much includes



Any alcohol use by pregnant women



Any alcohol use by those under age 21

Key steps in alcohol screening and brief counseling

1

Ask patients about their drinking.

2

Talk with patients in plain language about what they think is good and not so good about their drinking.

3

Provide options: ask if patient wants to stop drinking, cut down, seek help or continue with their present drinking pattern and come up with a plan.

4

Close on good terms regardless of patient response.

Screening and counseling should occur in many places



Making sure it happens in routine medical practice



1. Make sure staff understands that most patients who drink too much need brief counseling but may not need specialized alcoholic treatment.



2. Involve and build support with others in the medical practice, using current guidelines.



3. Develop a plan with them to make it part of standard service.



4. Train staff on how to screen and provide brief counseling.



5. Pilot test the plan to see if it works and change it as needed.



Alcohol Misuse: Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care

Recommendation Summary

Summary of Recommendations and Evidence

Population	Recommendation	Grade
Adults aged 18 and older	The USPSTF recommends that clinicians screen adults aged 18 years or older for alcohol misuse and provide persons engaged in risky or hazardous drinking with brief behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse	B
Adolescents (under 18 years of age)	The USPSTF concludes that the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening and behavioral counseling interventions in primary care settings to reduce alcohol misuse in adolescents.	I