

Older Adults Visit Online Sites for Screening and Brief Intervention for Unhealthy Alcohol Use

Kristin Masukawa BA; David L. Rosenbloom PhD, Eric Helmuth, Diana Liao MPH, Alison Moore, MD, MPH

University of California Los Angeles, Department of Medicine, Division of Geriatrics, Boston University School of Public Health, Department of Health Management and Policy

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Background: Online interventions for unhealthy alcohol use have proven efficacy in adult populations. With the aging of the baby boomer generation, there will be larger numbers of older adults who drink in excess of recommended drinking limits, however there is no literature comparing younger and older adults who visit online programs to change drinking behavior.

Methods: We examined data between January 1 to December 31, 2013 from visitors aged 21-80 to www.alcoholscreening.org (AS.org) who completed questions on drinking and others as part of the online screening and brief intervention (SBI).

Results: In one year, 94,221 adults aged 21-80 visited the site and answered drinking questions; 78,735 (84%) exceeded weekly or daily drinking limits, 77% were aged 21-49, 19% were aged 50-64 and 4% were aged 65 to 80. Seventy percent (N=55,332) agreed to answer further questions (same percentages in each age group). Across the three age groups, mean importance to change, selected number of negative consequences of drinking and number of barriers to make a change were lowest among the oldest age group, conversely, confidence to make a change was highest in the oldest age group ($p < 0.001$ for all comparisons) The most commonly selected barriers to change across age groups were not wanting to make a change (47, 49 and 53% from youngest to oldest) and friends and family drinking (66, 54 and 45% from youngest to oldest). Similar percentages of each age group wanted to cut back on drinking (77-79%) or stop drinking (21-24%). Those more likely to indicate a wish to reduce drinking were women, in the older age group, had higher importance to change, number of negative consequences confidence to make change, and number of barriers.

Conclusions: Most site visitors exceeded recommended drinking limits, almost a quarter of them were aged 50 years and older, and confidence to make a change increased with increasing age but desire to reduce drinking did not differ across age groups. Internet-based SBI for unhealthy alcohol use are used by all ages, however, if they work to reduce unhealthy drinking in older populations has not been explored.

Mean values	Age 21-49 N=42,527	Age 49-64 N=10,768	Age 65-80 N=2,031
Importance to change (0-10)	6.15	6.52	5.95
Number of negative consequences of drinking (0-18)	5.24	4.24	3.19
Confidence to make a change (0-10)	5.84	6.05	6.51
Number of barriers to make a change (0-7)	2.27	1.93	1.73