

# LET'S TALK

OPENING A CONVERSATION & BRIEF INTERVENTION TIPS



## Healthcare Providers Can Reduce the Negative Health Risks Associated with Alcohol Use

- Screen all adults to determine if patients are drinking at excessive levels.
- Provide feedback about health risks.
- Work together to reduce drinking if patient desires.

## Tips for Opening a Discussion About Alcohol with Patients

- Be prepared with a validated screener and resources for further referral.
- Remember to listen without judgment and ask open-ended questions.
- Try starting with: "To provide the best quality care, I'd like to ask about issues that affect your health, like smoking, exercise, diet, and alcohol use. Would it be okay if we chat about these for a few minutes?"

**For more information:** Planning and Implementing Screening and Brief Intervention for Risky Alcohol Use: A Step-by-Step Guide for Primary Care Practices  
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/documents/AlcoholSBIImplementationGuide-P.pdf>

## Brief Intervention Tips for Patients Who Screen Positive for Excessive Alcohol Use

### Offer Feedback

- Provide the typical range of scores for all patients screened.
- State what score represents low-risk drinking.
- Tell the patient their score, and that it puts them at risk for health problems.
- Ask their reaction, "How does this make you feel?"

### Listen

- Listen for change talk (patient concerns, problem recognition).
- Summarize patient's pros and cons for their current drinking behavior.
- Ask "On a scale of 0 to 10, how ready are you to change your drinking behavior?"
  - "Why did you choose that number?" or
  - "What would it take to raise that number?"
- Reflect and summarize throughout.

### Identify Options

- "Do you want to quit, cut down, or make no change?"
- "How will you do that? What might help you/get in the way?"
- If you give advice, ask permission to do so before, and ask their reaction after.

Summarize statements in favor of change, emphasize patient strengths, and restate any agreement reached. Ask, "Can we follow up about this at your next visit?" and thank the patient for talking with you.

