

alcohol screening

supporting health and life



What is alcohol screening about?

Alcohol screening poses simple questions to people in order to identify those at risk for, or experiencing, harm through their drinking. The questions help recipients reflect on their drinking and become aware of signs of potential problems related to alcohol use.

Screening may be carried out in a variety of settings (formal and casual) by professionals or non-specialists, including peers. It can also be done as a self-help exercise using web-based questionnaires. Whether online or in person, screening paves the way for some form of dialogue or brief intervention (e.g., summary internet advice, a short conversation, one or more short counselling sessions). Brief intervention aims to help the person explore how to deal with potential or existing problems.

Given their purpose, screening questions ideally are few in number, clear, quite concise and simple to respond to, with implications that can readily be taken up in discussion.

How do low-risk drinking guidelines relate to screening?

Low-risk drinking guidelines connect directly with the goal of screening. They point to patterns of risk and offer thresholds that people can use to estimate how susceptible they might be to firsthand alcohol-related problems.

The guidelines specify weekly and daily intake limits. Weekly limits reduce long-term harm such as cancer and heart disease. Daily limits reduce injury or other harms related to impairment.

The low-risk drinking guidelines tell us when it is inappropriate to drink at all, and screening can check for frequency of use in these situations as well.

Alcohol screening and low-risk drinking guidelines can work together to increase awareness and encourage healthier patterns of use.

Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines for adults

- Reduce long-term health risks by drinking no more than 10 drinks a week for women or 15 drinks a week for men and avoid drinking on some days each week
- Reduce risk of injury and harm by drinking no more than 3 drinks (for women) or 4 drinks (for men) on any single occasion
- Do not drink in situations where any impairment reduces ability to function safely and responsibly (e.g., when driving)
- The safest choice is to not drink at all while pregnant, planning to become pregnant or before breastfeeding

Alcohol Reality Check

A few simple questions to help people assess their own pattern of drinking against the low-risk drinking guidelines – available at www.alcoholreality.ca

A paper-based version is available at www.carbc.ca

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