




# ALCOHOL DRUG FINDINGS

## Research abstract

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### ▶ [Brief alcohol intervention for college drinkers: How brief is?](#)

**Kulesza M., Apperson M., Larimer M.E. et al.**  
**Addictive Behaviors: 2010, 35(7), 730–733.**

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*This US study found that in the short term, 50 minutes of motivational counselling with student drinkers was no more effective in reducing alcohol consumption than 10 minutes of motivational counselling.*


**SUMMARY** Brief interventions for college student drinkers have been shown to be effective in reducing both the amount of alcohol consumed, and the number of alcohol-related problems. However, the length of the brief intervention varies substantially across studies, for example, from five to 50 minutes. This US study sought to find out whether outcomes would differ between two brief interventions of differing durations.

114 undergraduate students who drank alcohol heavily were randomly assigned to one of three groups: either 10 minutes of motivational counselling, 50 minutes of motivational counselling, or a six-week wait before being counselled. The brief interventions were carried out two weeks after an initial assessment. Both were based on the [BASICS](#) harm reduction framework, created specifically for college students, which included a motivational interviewing component intended to facilitate discussions about typical drinking patterns, drinking consequences, and peer drinking 'norms'.

All participants were assessed at baseline (before any intervention had taken place), and then again four weeks after the interventions. The researchers measured alcohol consumption, alcohol-related problems, and protective behavioural strategies (for example, alternating alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, and setting consumption limits).

Compared with the waiting-list control group, neither intervention showed advantages for reducing alcohol-related problems or increasing protective behaviours. However, there were significantly greater reductions in alcohol consumption after the 10-minute intervention than in the control group. This was not the case after the 50-minute intervention, though when directly compared with the 10-minute intervention, outcomes did not significantly differ.

The results of this study suggest that a very brief intervention (10 minutes) could produce short-term reductions in alcohol consumption for this population.

 **COMMENTARY** The key advantages of a short brief intervention, compared with a longer brief intervention, are lower costs, and a shorter time commitment for both participants and practitioners. Though this study does provide some evidence that a short brief intervention might be preferable to a longer intervention or no intervention, the overall gains of the short intervention were small. The short intervention succeeded on only one of three measures, and this was when tested four weeks after the intervention. Whether there would be any medium to long-term gains is unknown.

All the participants in this study were psychology undergraduates. Most were white (84%) and female (72%), and they averaged 20 years of age. The researchers noted that this was fairly representative of

psychology students in that university, but not representative of the wider student population.

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