

A unique study discerned lasting benefits nine years after a **brief alcohol intervention**.¹ It took place in Tromsø in Norway where in 1986 mass screening for heart disease risk factors uncovered 338 at-risk drinkers who joined the study. They were identified by admitting to regular drinking and by blood tests (for a chemical called CGT) indicative of liver toxicity related to heavy drinking. Participants were randomly divided into three groups. Two immediately received advice on their drinking lasting up to 15 minutes. The third underwent a similar intervention but a year later. During this time drinking and blood CGT levels fell equally after the two interventions but increased in the waiting group, showing that at least in the short term the interventions had been effective.

Nine years later another mass screening took place in the town and 247 residents from the earlier study were re-screened. Researchers set out to test whether the interventions' effects had lasted, but needed an 'untouched' control group for comparison. This they ingeniously constructed from residents screened in 1986 who fell just below the CGT levels which qualified them for the earlier study. There were 95 of whom 62 were re-screened nine years later. After adjusting for absolute CGT levels and age, there had been far greater reductions in CGT levels in the intervention groups than in the control group and the intervention groups were now drinking only a quarter as much as they used to. Long-term follow-up studies after brief interventions are rare but have previously found lasting reductions in drinking and drink-related problems ▶ *Links*. What makes the Tromsø study different is that the patients had no idea that they would be followed up so no chance to factor this in to their drinking, while the blood tests eliminated the risk that they might downplay their consumption.

LINKS Nugget 8.4 • *Investing in alcohol treatment: brief interventions*, issue 7

¹ Nilssen O. "Long-term effect of brief intervention in at-risk alcohol drinkers: a 9-year follow-up study." *Alcohol & Alcoholism*: 2004, 39(6), p. 548–551. **AC**