

“Come up with a plan for Booze free days” Behaviour Change Strategies for limiting or reducing alcohol



change strategies project

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Introduction and aims

Most people do not seek help for reducing alcohol consumption¹ and instead use behaviour change strategies². These frequently used strategies are however under-investigated and no comprehensive account exists of the range and types of strategies people use.

Design and methods

We searched the internet for the presence of cognitive and behavioural strategies that could be used to limit or reduce alcohol consumption. We found 116 health promotion and treatment websites as well as consumer forums and message boards that contained these strategies.

Pre-decisional phase form intention

Feedback

- Take a self-assessment or test
- Ask other people whether they think there is a problem
- Find out how much other people drink
- Engage in self-reflection

Realisation

- Realise that drinking is a problem
- Recognise difference between misuse and dependence
- Admit the problem to self or others
- Recognise denial or justification

Identify barriers to initiating change

- Identify or understand motivation for alcohol consumption (e.g., loneliness, boredom)
- Identify psychological or physical issues contributing towards drinking (e.g., stress, depression, pain)
- Identify attitudes related to alcohol that are barrier (e.g., alcohol as a friend)
- Identify environmental or cultural factors encouraging alcohol (e.g., social group)

Decisional Balance

- Consider harms
- Think of the benefits from quitting
- Weigh up pros and cons
- Set reasons why change is needed

Knowledge and Information

- Seek information on alcohol harms
- Seek information on how to reduce and what to expect (e.g., withdrawal)
- Find recommended drinking limits
- Know how to measure alcohol content in standard drinks
- Search for ways on how to cut down drinking

Pre-actional phase initiate intention

Commitment

- Make a decision to change
- Set a quit date
- Seek opportunities to be accountable
- Initiate intention (e.g. sign-up for a challenge)

Action planning

- Plan how to reduce or limit alcohol
- Develop specific coping plans
- Choose an approach
- Set specific goals

Actional phase enact the change

Avoidance

- Avoid alcohol except pre-planned
- Have alcohol free period
- Reduce alcohol accessibility
- Use financial management to reduce alcohol (e.g., set budget)
- Learn to say NO to offers
- Avoid places associated with alcohol
- Avoid socialising at specific times of day
- Avoid people who drink
- Avoid drinking in rounds

Alternatives

- Replace drinking routine with another activity
- Mitigate for the time normally spent drinking
- Focus on non-alcoholic drinks
- Replace alcohol with a pleasant treat
- Disguise your drink as alcohol (e.g., use wine glass)
- Do something with the new energy derived from not consuming alcohol
- Develop new activities or interests that provide a sense of meaning and purpose

Consumption control

- Change the way of drinking (e.g., drink slowly, avoid salty snacks)
- Weaken alcohol content
- Limit time for drinking (e.g., leave early)
- Take only a certain amount of money when going out
- Pre-measure alcohol before drinking
- Monitor consumption
- Focus on staying in control
- Reduce the desire for alcohol (e.g., brush teeth)

Seek inspiration

- Seek role model
- Read other people's stories
- Get motivated by other's success

Urge management

- Recognise the causes and triggers
- Prepare for the triggers
- Use distraction when craving
- Eat, drink something unpleasant
- Talk to a supportive person
- Use urge surfing
- Recall reasons for quitting

Self-monitoring

- Journal thoughts and emotions
- Examine consumption patterns
- Track consumption
- Review progress

Reinforcement

- Schedule rewards
- Learn new ways of rewarding behaviour
- Use savings from alcohol on rewards (e.g., holiday)
- Acknowledge or celebrate progress

Maintain readiness

- Be positive
- Be determined
- Take it slow
- Keep trying, don't give up
- Exercise willpower
- Build confidence

Post-actional phase evaluate

Evaluation

- Recognise the changes
- Examine lapses
- Evaluate goals and strategies

Multi-phase

Social support

- Tell family and friends about alcohol problem
- Seek help and support when barriers get in the way
- Find a quit buddy
- Connect with similar others

Treatment

- Seek face-to-face treatment
- Take inpatient program
- Call helpline
- Attend peer support group
- Seek help for withdrawal
- Use specific treatment (detox)

Wellbeing

- Attend to physical health
- Attend to mental health
- Attend to emotions
- Get good sleep
- Avoid stimulants
- Balance work-life

Results

We identified 2989 change strategies that were grouped into 19 different categories of strategies. Strategies were organised by the Action Phase model of goal achievement³ into pre-decisional (e.g. decisional balance, realisation), Post-decisional (e.g. action planning, commitment), actional (e.g. alternatives, consumption control, maintaining readiness) and post-actional (e.g. evaluation) strategies, as well as three multi-phase strategies (e.g. social support). Eleven of the 19 identified strategies differed according to the source. The largest difference was for the strategies of consumption control, which was promoted on advice sites, but less frequently on treatment and consumer sites.

Discussions

This is the largest and most **comprehensive** study of change strategies used to limit or reduce alcohol consumption. Strategies promoted online were most frequently related to taking action (i.e. consumption control) and there were few instances of planning or self-evaluation. These findings can inform cognitive and behavioural interventions and provide important information for enhancing existing intervention content.

References

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