

Brief alcohol interventions in the breast screening setting: are they needed, are they acceptable and do they work?

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Introduction: Alcohol is a major modifiable breast cancer risk factor, even in very low amounts. Yet, awareness of this risk remains low, including among midlife and older-aged women who are drinking at increasingly risky levels. Informed by our mixed-methods pre-implementation research with breast screening service consumers (demonstrating need and acceptability), we developed and examined the effectiveness of a brief alcohol intervention for improving awareness of alcohol as a breast cancer risk factor, improving alcohol literacy, and reducing alcohol consumption among women attending routine breast screening.

Method: This double-blind randomised controlled trial recruited women attending Maroondah BreastScreen (Eastern Health, Melbourne) between February-August 2021, reporting any level of alcohol consumption. The active arm comprised brief alcohol and lifestyle intervention. The control arm comprised brief lifestyle intervention only. Interventions were delivered via animation on an iPad.

Results: Of 557 participants, mean age was 60.3 years (SD=7.7, range 40-87 years), 455 (81.7%) had recently consumed alcohol, and 110 (19.8%) were aware of the alcohol-breast cancer link. There were significant increases in the proportion of participants identifying alcohol as a breast cancer risk factor at four weeks for active (65.4%v19.8%, OR=41.3, 95% CI 17.6–97.0) and control (37.8%v19.7%, OR=4.9, 95% CI 2.8–8.8) arms, with change over time greater for the active arm ($p_{\text{arm} \times \text{time}} < 0.001$). Alcohol literacy also increased to a greater extent in the active arm. Change in alcohol consumption was not observed.

Discussion/Conclusion: This is the first study to demonstrate the benefits of a tailored brief alcohol intervention implemented in the breast screening setting.

Practice/Policy Implications: Alcohol brief interventions in this novel clinical setting reach a population previously overlooked as a target of alcohol health promotion, have huge potential for scalability, and are particularly relevant given this group's rising prevalence of risky drinking, and evidence that even very low consumption increases breast cancer risk.

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