A combined Web Based and Ecological Momentary Intervention for incoming first-year university students: A three-arm randomised controlled trial.

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Introduction and Aims: For new students, the transition from high school to university is a period associated with significant changes and uncertainty. Unfortunately, the early transition (particularly Orientation Week) is also associated with increased alcohol use and harm. Web-based Interventions (WBIs) and Ecological Momentary Interventions (EMIs) are two methods that have had some success in reducing alcohol use among university students and may be particularly effective if aimed at the transition to university. The aim of the current study is to investigate the effectiveness of a combined WBI and EMI intervention to reduce alcohol use among incoming university students.

Methods: Incoming first-year students (n = 946) were randomized into either a WBI+EMI, WBI-only, or an assessment only condition. All participants completed online questionnaires before university, after first and second semester, and reported their alcohol use fortnightly throughout their first semester. Those in the WBI and WBI+EMI conditions both received online feedback about their drinking (WBI) immediately following the pre-university survey and those in the WBI+EMI also received eight Orientation Week and six academic year EMIs.

Results: Using generalised linear mixed models, we found that there were no significant differences between the conditions in Orientation Week drinking, academic year drinking (both "typical" semester drinking and as measured fortnightly by EMAs), or alcohol-related harms.

Discussions and Conclusions: A WBI+EMI interventions aimed at the transition to university did not reduce university students' alcohol use. The transition, however, continues to be a period of serious harm where students drink more than any other period.

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