

## Healthy Living Message

### Limit Alcohol

*This information is for clinical staff to share with the Veteran.*

**Key Message for Veterans:** If you choose to drink alcohol, drink in moderation (women no more than 1 drink a day; men no more than 2 drinks a day). Avoid “binge drinking.” If you are concerned about your drinking, talk to your VA health care team about getting help.

#### Expanded Message for Veterans:

- One drink is:
  - 12 oz. regular beer OR
  - 8-9 oz. malt liquor OR
  - 5 oz. table wine OR
  - 1.5 oz. 80-proof hard liquor.
- Binge drinking is having:
  - More than 3 drinks on one occasion for women and adults over age 65.
  - More than 4 drinks on one occasion for men.
- Remember, on average, women should have no more than one drink a day (7 drinks per week) and men should have no more than 2 drinks a day (14 drinks per week).
- For many adults, drinking small amounts of alcohol does not cause serious health problems.
- Too much alcohol use or binge drinking can lead to higher risk of health problems, such as liver damage or injuries.
- The following people should not drink alcohol at all:
  - Children and teenagers
  - People of any age who cannot limit their drinking to the recommended levels
  - Women who are pregnant or who plan to become pregnant
  - People who plan to drive, operate machines, or take part in other activities that require attention, skill, or coordination
  - People taking certain medications that interact with alcohol
  - People with certain medical conditions
- People recovering from alcohol dependence (alcoholism)
- Alcohol dependence can be treated. Effective treatments include individual counseling, group treatments, medications to reduce craving or prevent relapse, and inpatient or residential treatment. Talk to your VA health care team about the resources VA has that can help.



## Message Delivery by Clinical Staff:

### During Face to Face Encounters:

- Provide additional information during alcohol screening or if requested by patient. If the alcohol screen by AUDIT-C is positive, brief counseling intervention is required.
- Discuss during any clinical or patient education encounter (individual or group, in-person, virtual, or by telephone) if information is requested.
- Veterans who have a history of alcohol abuse and dependence or Veterans with possible alcohol intoxication or withdrawal may require further assessment and referral.
- Discuss and review results of the VHA online Health Risk Assessment (under development) during a clinical visit.

### At the Facility Level:

- Participate in mass media campaigns (posters, etc.) to increase general awareness of the issue, to reduce alcohol-impaired driving, and to inform Veterans that VA has clinical resources.
- Participate in medical center, VISN, and national outreach events.

## Important Considerations:

If a Veteran needs more intensive intervention in this area than the clinical staff member delivering the message is able to provide, the staff member should refer the Veteran to the appropriate clinical staff, clinic or program for further education or clinical care, following local referral/consult protocol.

## Clinical Staff Tools: *(Staff may also benefit by reviewing the Veteran Tools listed in the next section).*

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>\*
- National clinical reminder for alcohol screening (VA-ALCOHOL USE SCREEN (AUDIT-C)) and brief counseling if the screen is positive (VA-ALCOHOL AUDIT-C POSITIVE F/U EVAL). More information at: <http://vista.med.va.gov/reminders/index.html>
- Frequently Asked Questions about [AUDIT-C](#)\* For CLINICIANS (2003)

## Veteran Tools:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm>\*
- National Institutes for Health: <http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/default.asp>\*
  - An interactive assessment of an individual's drinking pattern and the risk for alcohol problems:
  - <http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/IsYourDrinkingPatternRisky/WhatsYourPattern.asp>\*



- *Alcohol: A Women's Health Issue:*  
<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochurewomen/women.htm>\*
- Healthfinder.gov:  
<http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicID=16&arealD=0>\*
- Safe Driving Initiative Brochure:  
[http://www.safedriving.va.gov/docs/safe\\_driving\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.safedriving.va.gov/docs/safe_driving_brochure.pdf)
- Other driving resources: <http://www.safedriving.va.gov/resources/driving.asp>
- A Drinker's Check-up: <http://www.veterandrunkerscheckup.org/>\*
- Healthfinder: Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation  
<http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=16>\*

\* Indicates that the link leads to a non-VA website. The VA is not responsible for the content that is on the site.

## Supporting Information:

### Definitions:

- Definition of "One Drink": 12 oz. regular beer OR 8-9 oz. malt liquor OR 5 oz. table wine OR 1.5 oz. 80-proof hard liquor.
- Excessive Alcohol Use: Heavy drinking (drinking more than two drinks per day on average for men or more than one drink per day on average for women), or binge drinking (drinking 5 or more drinks during a single occasion for men or 4 or more drinks during a single occasion for women)
- Binge Drinking: According to the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)\*, binge drinking is defined as a pattern of alcohol consumption that brings the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level to 0.08% or above. This pattern of drinking usually corresponds to more than 4 drinks on a single occasion for men or more than 3 drinks on a single occasion for women and adults over age 65, generally within about 2 hours.
- Problem Drinking: Pattern of drinking that results in harm to one's health, interpersonal relationships, or ability to work. Certain manifestations of alcohol abuse include failure to fulfill responsibilities at work, school, or home; drinking in dangerous situations, such as while driving; legal problems associated with alcohol use; and continued drinking despite problems that are caused or worsened by drinking. Alcohol abuse can lead to alcohol dependence.
- Alcoholism or Alcohol Dependence: A diagnosable disease characterized by several factors, including a strong craving for alcohol, continued use despite harm or personal injury, the inability to limit drinking, physical illness when drinking stops, and the need to increase the amount drunk to feel the effects.

### Evidence and/or Guidelines:

- USPSTF Recommendation on Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse (2004). Available at:



National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention  
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<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf/uspsdrin.htm>\*

- The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends screening and behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse by adults, including pregnant women, in primary care settings.  
Grade: [B Recommendation](#).\*
- Guide to Community Preventive Services. Motor vehicle-related injury prevention: Reducing Alcohol-impaired Driving.  
[www.thecommunityguide.org/mvoi/AID/index.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/mvoi/AID/index.html)\*<sup>1-6</sup>

#### **VHA Guidance:**

- VA/DOD Clinical Practice Guideline on Substance Abuse Disorders, Module A ([http://www.healthquality.va.gov/sud/sud\\_full\\_601f.pdf](http://www.healthquality.va.gov/sud/sud_full_601f.pdf) )
- Performance measures(PMs)/supporting indicators(SIs)/monitors –
  - Sa7 – Patients Screened Annually for Alcohol Misuse
  - Sa17 – Brief Alcohol Counseling for Alcohol Misuse Screening Result of 5 or Greater
  - FY 2010 Performance Measure Technical Manual (Volume 2) Clinical Specification  
<http://vaww.oqp.med.va.gov/programs/pm/pmPolicyTechManual.aspx>

#### **VHA Program Office Stakeholders:**

- Office of Mental Health Services
- National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

#### **VHA Content Experts:**

- Office of Mental Health Services

#### **Source Documents:**

1. Guide to Community Preventive Services. Motor vehicle-related injury prevention: Reducing Alcohol-impaired Driving.  
<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/mvoi/AID/index.html>.\*
2. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*. 4th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association; 2000.
3. Chapter 9 - Alcoholic Beverages. In: Services UDoAUDoHaH, ed. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; 2005:43-46.
4. Hales CM, Randhawa G. Screening and behavioral counseling interventions in primary care to reduce alcohol misuse. *Am Fam Physician*. Nov 1 2004;70(9):1743-1744.



5. NIAAA council approves definition of binge drinking. *NIAAA Newsletter*. 2004;3(3).  
[http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Newsletter/winter2004/Newsletter\\_Number\\_3.pdf](http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Newsletter/winter2004/Newsletter_Number_3.pdf).\*
6. Maciosek MV, Edwards NM, Coffield AB, et al. Priorities among effective clinical preventive services: methods. *Am J Prev Med*. Jul 2006;31(1):90-96.

