

Student drinking: Changing perceptions reduces alcohol misuse

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Giving students personalised feedback on their drinking behaviour and how it compares to social norms might help to reduce alcohol misuse, according to a Cochrane Systematic Review.

A large body of social science research has established that [students](#) tend to overestimate the amount of [alcohol](#) that their peers consume. This overestimation causes many to have misguided views about whether their own behaviour is normal and may contribute to the 1.8 million alcohol related deaths every year. Social norms interventions that provide feedback about own and peer drinking behaviours may help to address these misconceptions.

Researchers analysed data from 22 trials that together included 7,275 college and university students, mostly studying in the US. They found that students who were provided with personalised feedback via the internet or individual face-to-face sessions drank less often and indulged in less binge drinking than those in control groups. Web-based feedback also resulted in significant reductions in blood alcohol content and alcohol related problems.

Group counselling and mailed feedback were not found to be effective compared to control interventions, although the researchers say further studies comparing the different ways of providing social normative feedback are required. "We can't make direct comparisons between the different interventions, but based on a small number of studies web-based interventions would certainly seem to be a cost-effective option

for reducing [alcohol misuse](#)," said lead researcher Maria Teresa Moreira, from the School of Health and Social Care at Oxford Brookes University in the UK.

"We know that social norms have a powerful impact on thought and behaviour, so changing people's perceptions about what is normal can really help. Most of the effects lasted for a few months, but some lasted over a year, particularly for the web-based feedback," added Moreira.

Source: Wiley ([news](#) : [web](#))

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