

# More difficult to achieve controlled drinking than to give up alcohol entirely

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Credit: Kevin Casper/public domain

People who are seeking treatment for alcohol dependence and whose goal is to quit drinking entirely are more likely to achieve this goal if they are treated by a care provider who advocates total abstinence. Those who wish to learn to drink in moderation are not as successful, even when they are treated by a care provider who works with controlled

consumption. These are the results of a study carried out at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. London Business School, Antai at Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Copenhagen Business School are amongst the holders.

Care providers in Sweden have different views on how [alcohol problems](#) should be treated. Some suggest that people with [alcohol dependence](#) can learn to control their drinking, while others believe these people should practice total abstinence.

Previous studies have shown that the crucial factor in [treatment success](#) is that patients and care providers have the same view, and that the choice of treatment method plays a subordinate role. But how great an influence choice of method has on the final treatment outcome has not been studied previously.

The study followed up 201 adult patients 2.5 years after treatment onset. It showed that a shared view between patient and care provider was not decisive for the treatment outcome. "Instead," states Associate Professor Kristina Berglund, who studies dependence at the Department of Psychology, "patients whose goal was total abstinence were more successful than those who had chosen to control their drinking."

Around 90 percent of patients who were in agreement with their care provider on total abstinence were still sober at the follow-up, whereas only 50 percent who were in agreement with their care provider on controlled consumption treatment had succeeded in controlling their drinking at follow-up.

According to Associate Professor Kristina Berglund, "It is easy to believe that the patient and [care provider](#) having a common goal is the most important factor in achieving good treatment outcomes, but it is not that simple. Our study shows that, regardless of agreement on goals and

methods, in the end it is more difficult to stick to controlled [drinking](#) than to give it up entirely."

The study findings are relevant to the current debate on total abstinence vs. safe, controlled alcohol consumption as [treatment](#) goals in cases of alcohol dependence.

**More information:** Kristina J. Berglund et al. Is There a Need for Congruent Treatment Goals Between Alcohol-Dependent Patients and Caregivers?, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2016). DOI: [10.1111/acer.13003](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.13003)

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