

Researchers identify model for reducing binge drinking in college students

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Researchers found the secret to getting college students to drink responsibly is convincing them it will quickly improve their health, relationships and grades. However, sustaining responsible drinking behavior takes a comprehensive set of supports, according to a new study in the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*.

Researchers surveyed nearly 300 college students who self-reported binge [drinking](#) within the last 30 days. Questions assessed their willingness to initiate and sustain [responsible drinking](#) habits as well as which factors they believed would be most helpful to that process.

"Prior studies have shown that convincing people to change their [behavior](#) requires a comprehensive approach," says Manoj Sharma, MBBS, Ph.D., a professor of behavioral health at Jackson State University and lead researcher on this study. "As difficult as it is for people to adopt new behaviors, it is even harder for them to sustain those changes."

Creating a lasting change

Surveyed students indicated that initiating a change to drink responsibly or abstain from drinking would first require them being convinced of the immediate advantages to health, relationships and grades. In addition, participants noted that confidence in their ability to change—either from a belief in themselves or a higher power—as well as a change in their

physical environment, such as moving out of a fraternity house where drinking is prevalent, would be necessary for change.

The requirements for sustaining responsible drinking or abstinence leaned more heavily on actions than beliefs. Respondents said keeping a diary or utilizing an app that helped track drinking habits would help monitor their consumption. They also said adopting new habits like exercise or other positive behaviors would help them avoid heavy drinking in response to emotional triggers. Finally, those surveyed indicated that recruiting friends and family for emotional support would help ensure they maintain responsible drinking habits.

"Having identified these core supports, we can now design precision interventions that can be implemented by physicians, colleges, even parents," says Dr. Sharma. "Anyone can apply these principles to create a lasting positive change." His colleague and co-author on this study, Dr. Vinayak K. Nahar, an assistant professor at Lincoln Memorial University is designing such a precision intervention to be implemented by physicians.

Women and Non-Whites Most Open to Change

The study also analyzed participants' overall willingness to initiate and sustain responsible drinking habits or abstinence. Compared to men, women were 38 percent more willing to initiate or try responsible drinking and 49 percent more willing to sustain those habits.

Non-white [college students](#) were 41 percent more willing to initiate responsible drinking behaviors than whites and 96 percent more willing to sustain those habits.

Each group also expressed higher degrees of willingness to initiate change than to sustain those new behaviors. Men's willingness to sustain

a behavioral change was 32 percent lower than their willingness to initiate responsible drinking. Women expressed a slightly smaller reduction of 27 percent.

Most striking, when compared to whites, who overall had a 33 percent reduction in willingness to sustain responsible drinking, non-whites had only a seven percent reduction in [willingness](#) to sustain those habits.

"Drinking is less of an accepted cultural norm among women and non-whites, and so those groups are more inclined to change their behaviors," says Dr. Sharma. "Convincing white men to adopt more responsible and moderate levels of drinking appears to be the bigger challenge at this point."

More information: Manoj Sharma et al, Predictors of Responsible Drinking or Abstinence Among College Students Who Binge Drink: A Multitheory Model Approach, *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* (2018). [DOI: 10.7556/jaoa.2018.120](https://doi.org/10.7556/jaoa.2018.120)

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