

School for Public Health Research

Public Health Evidence Briefing

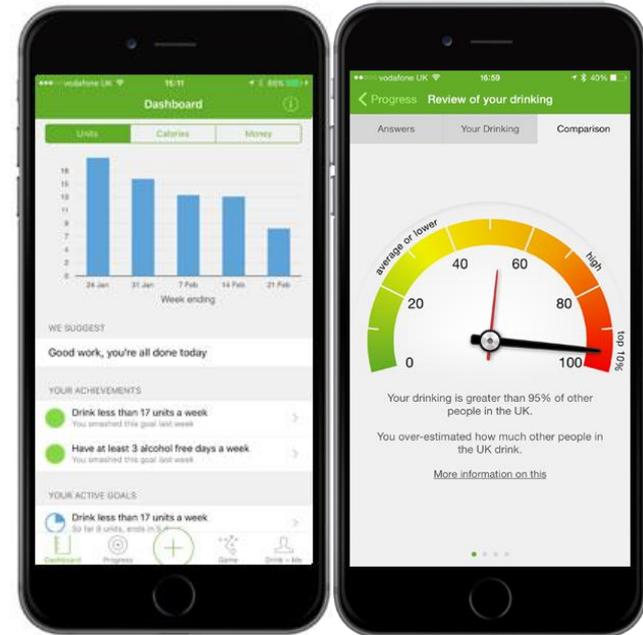
Building the evidence for cost-effective public health practice



National Institute for
Health Research

The development and evaluation of an alcohol reduction app

- Alcohol consumption is responsible for approximately 3.3m deaths worldwide each year. More than 10m people in the UK regularly drink above recommended guidelines.
- NIHR SPHR researchers have developed a smartphone app (Drink Less) to evaluate which behaviour change techniques help people drink less alcohol.
- A version of the app that includes normative feedback, cognitive bias re-training, self-monitoring and action planning may assist with drinking reduction.



Tackling excessive alcohol consumption is a public health priority. Apps may be able to help, but there is little evidence about the behaviour change techniques they should contain.

Key issues

- Alcohol consumption is responsible for approximately 3.3 million deaths worldwide each year.
- Over ten million people in the UK regularly drink in excess of Government guidelines.
- Web interventions to help people reduce their consumption appear to be effective, but there is little evidence about apps.
- There is little understanding about what behaviour change techniques an app should contain to make it effective.

What we did

NIHR SPHR researchers examined the literature for behaviour change theory and techniques that may inform interventions to help people reduce their alcohol consumption. Alcohol and behaviour change experts were consulted for their views about which techniques an app should contain. This led to a scientifically-informed app which was professionally designed and subsequently improved in response to user feedback. Groups of users were randomly given intensive or minimal versions of different techniques and the effectiveness of each was measured by comparing levels of drinking before and after using the app.

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Findings and implications

- On average people logged-in 12 times and drank four fewer units of alcohol at the end of using the app compared with the start.
- People who received a more intensive version of a technique did not reduce their alcohol consumption significantly more than people who got a less intensive version of the same technique.
- The combinations of normative feedback and cognitive bias re-training, and of self-monitoring and action-planning led to improved alcohol outcomes.

What next?

Researchers will test a version of the app containing the techniques against the care that people seeking help for alcohol reduction usually receive in order to determine whether the app can provide an effective alternative.

“Our findings show that Drink Less is being used by heavy drinkers, that they are engaging with it well and that we have a promising basis for further development and evaluation.”
Susan Michie,
Principal Investigator

References:

WHO. Global status report on alcohol and health, 2014

SPHR Contact/Find out more about this study at:

For more info and links to publications please visit: drinklessalcohol.com

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