

School for Public Health Research

## Public Health Evidence Briefing

Building the evidence for cost-effective public health practice

### Can new technologies be used to reduce excessive alcohol use?

- Excessive drinking contributes significantly to physical and psychological illness, injury, death and social harm in all age groups. Digital interventions could provide wide reach at low cost if found to be effective and acceptable.
- An evidence review by NIHR SPHR researchers looked at trials which compared the drinking of people getting digital alcohol advice from their gadgets against those that did not.
- People drink less if they receive advice about alcohol from a computer, mobile or the internet.



## New technological applications are developing rapidly and are easily available to the public; however, there is little evidence of their effectiveness in improving health.

### Key issues

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- Heavy drinking causes over 60 diseases, as well as many accidents, injuries and early deaths each year.
- People can benefit from advice or counselling about their drinking. Even short sessions of advice given by GPs or nurses have led people to reduce their alcohol intake.
- However, many people are often too busy to visit their doctor or nurse, and some feel embarrassed about discussing their drinking. They use computers, mobile phones or the internet to seek advice about alcohol.
- The study aimed to find out if these gadgets can help people reduce their drinking and also what features of digital advice are more or less helpful to users.

### What we did

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NIHR SPHR researchers from Fuse based at Newcastle University, in partnership with University of Bristol and University College London, carried out two linked systematic reviews and found 55 trials which compared the drinking of people getting digital advice about alcohol from their gadgets against those that did not.

### Findings and implications

- Individuals cut down by about 1.5 pints of beer or a third of a bottle of wine each week. This was seen at 1, 6 and 12 months after delivery.
- There was not enough information to determine if advice is better delivered via PC, mobile or the internet. Overall people were positive about advice delivered digitally. Some preferred to keep track of their drinking with their GP, others were nervous about entering personal information electronically; however, some preferred the anonymity.

### What next?

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This is one of two systematic reviews that examined digital interventions to reduce alcohol consumption. A second review explored views about digital alcohol interventions and found that they were typically regarded as helpful and acceptable to a wide range potential users. However, most of the research to date has not included mobile phone applications (apps); their impact and appeal need to be investigated in future work.

### References:

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<http://www.fuse.ac.uk/nihrsp/hr/cross-centre/collaboration/newtechnologiesforreducingexcessivealcoholuse.html>

### SPHR Contact/Find out more about this study at:

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