"No-contact" interventions for unhealthy college drinking: efficacy of alternatives to person-delivered intervention approaches

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CRD summary
This review of no-contact interventions concluded that mailed and computer-based interventions were feasible and promising methods to reduce alcohol consumption in college students. The authors' conclusions were supported by the results presented, but the lack of detail of review methods, study quality and individual study details made it difficult to assess their reliability.

Authors' objectives
To evaluate the effects of no-contact interventions for reducing unhealthy drinking amongst college students.

Searching
MEDLINE and PsychINFO were searched. Search terms were reported, but not the dates covered by the search. Reference lists, conference proceedings and websites of internet interventions were searched. Only published studies were considered for inclusion.

Study selection
Studies of college students that assessed at least one intervention that did not involve real-time contact compared with a control and which reported an outcome that related to alcohol consumption or consequences were eligible for inclusion. Studies did not have to screen participants for unhealthy alcohol use. Studies that included extensive direct in person contact were excluded.

Included studies assessed either mailed (personalised normative feedback (PNF) with or without a two hour group session) or computer-based interventions (web-based PNF or alcohol newsletters). Participants were recruited from psychology classes, college courses, a university health centre, email, newspaper adverts and fliers or telephone screening from a random list. Outcome measures varied, but included drinks per day and per week, blood alcohol content (BAC), binge drinking frequency, Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) and alcohol problems. Duration of follow-up ranged from one to 12 months.

The authors did not state how many reviewers performed the study selection.

Assessment of study quality
The authors did not state that they assessed validity.

Data extraction
Details of the intervention, outcomes and brief details of the results were extracted. The authors did not state how many reviewers performed the data extraction.

Methods of synthesis
Results were presented in a narrative summary, grouped by the type of intervention.

Results of the review
Eleven studies were included in the review (n=4,390): six assessed mailed interventions (n=1,459) and five assessed computer-based interventions (n=2,931). Sample size per study ranged from 26 to 2,194. All studies appeared to be randomised controlled trials (RCTs).

Mailed interventions: After six weeks, three studies reported reductions in weekly drinking and one for monthly drinking for the mailed PNF group compared with assessment only. One study reported outcomes after three, six and 12 months and found that mailed PNF decreased high-risk alcohol consumption and problems for women only. The
final study found no between group differences at one year for AUDIT scores.

**Computer-based interventions:** Two studies reported immediate post-intervention results. In one study men in the web PNF group were more likely to report intention to seek help and women had a greater Readiness to Change score, but there were no between-group differences at one month. The other study reported greater reductions in daily drinking and a delay in increased drinking at three months. Two other studies reported reductions in drinking and alcohol problems up to six months; one study of alcohol newsletters found no differences between groups at 30 days.

**Authors' conclusions**
Mailed and computer-based no-contact interventions were feasible and promising methods to reduce alcohol consumption among college students.

**CRD commentary**
This review had clearly stated objectives and specified inclusion criteria that covered participants, interventions and outcomes. The authors attempted to find additional studies, but they included only published studies in the review and it was unclear whether there were any language restrictions, so it was possible that some relevant research may have been excluded. No details of the review methods were reported, so any steps taken to reduce errors or bias were unknown. There was no quality assessment, so it was not possible to judge the reliability of the evidence. The reporting of the individual study details was somewhat limited (no details of age, gender and numerical results). The authors’ conclusions were supported by the results presented, but the lack of detail of review methods, study quality and individual study details made it difficult to assess their reliability.

**Implications of the review for practice and research**

**Practice:** The authors did not state any implications for practice.

**Research:** The authors stated that further research was needed to assess the duration of any effects, mechanisms of change, outcome moderators and how to enhance the effectiveness of these interventions.

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This is a critical abstract of a systematic review that meets the criteria for inclusion on DARE. Each critical abstract contains a brief summary of the review methods, results and conclusions followed by a detailed critical assessment on the reliability of the review and the conclusions drawn.