

# Don't get drunk: advice college kids may not get from docs

28 September 2015, by Lindsey Tanner



In this Thursday, Dec. 20, 2012, file photo, mixed drinks sit on a hotel bar in San Francisco. Government researchers say "deplorably" few college students are warned by doctors about dangers from alcohol and drugs or encouraged to cut down or abstain, according to a study published Monday, Sept. 28, 2015, in *JAMA Pediatrics*. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Government researchers say "deplorably" few college students are warned by doctors about the danger from alcohol and drugs or encouraged to reduce drinking or substance use.

Their survey suggests that most doctors ask college students and other young adults about alcohol or drug use at regularly scheduled visits. But doctors don't go much beyond that initial question less than half of the time.

The study by National Institutes of Health researchers was published Monday in *JAMA Pediatrics*. Some highlights about the findings:

## THE SURVEY

About 2,100 college students and other young adults across the country were asked in 2012 and

2013 if they'd seen a doctor in the previous year and had been asked and counseled about their drinking, smoking and drug use. Participants had taken part in an earlier government health survey while in high school. In the new survey, most attended college but about one-third were not students.

## DOCTORS & COUNSELING

Most of those surveyed had a recent doctor visit where they were asked about smoking, drinking and substance abuse. Fewer than half the college students said they'd been counseled about risks of those habits. Only one-third of college students who told researchers they'd been drunk at least six times in the previous month said doctors had advised them to cut down or stop. That advice was slightly less common for college students who were frequent smokers or drug users.

Non-students were slightly more likely to get that kind of counseling.

Lead researcher Ralph Hingson of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism said it's possible participants didn't tell doctors the truth about their drinking habits. Even so, physicians' lack of advice may send a message that heavy drinking is OK, Hingson said.

## DRINKING STATS

Overall, 40 percent of participants told researchers they'd consumed five or more drinks on at least one occasion and 10 percent had been drunk at least six times in the past month.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, alcohol is linked with nearly 2,000 deaths each year among college students, and many more assaults and date rapes.

## WHY NO COUNSELING?

Dr. Tanveer Mir, chair of the American College of Physicians' Board of Regents, said doctors may assume college students already know about the risks and consequences. Also, physician training often doesn't emphasize that those problems are preventable and treatable, and physicians may feel that there isn't enough time in an office visit to address the issue, Mir said. She was not involved in the study.

The researchers said efforts are needed to remove those barriers because studies have shown that screening and brief counseling can reduce alcohol misuse.

**More information:** JAMA Pediatrics:  
[bit.ly/1adWrco](https://bit.ly/1adWrco)

NIH: [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

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