

## CASE ALCOHOL AND BRIEF INTERVENTIONS

# Savings from interventions for excessive alcohol use



**€67,5 million**  
brief interventions for all heavy  
drinkers in the HUS area

**€148 million**  
saved in health care  
expenses



## CASE: ALCOHOL AND BRIEF INTERVENTIONS

### Savings from interventions for excessive alcohol use

Excessive alcohol consumption adds around one billion euros per year to the public sector expenses in Finland. Pensions and sickness allowances account for a quarter of these expenses. Brief interventions are an effective way to impact people's alcohol consumption habits and prevent the negative effects of alcohol. The purpose of these brief interventions is to reduce excessive alcohol consumption.

For women, a brief intervention should be arranged if they consume at least 2 standard units of alcohol a day or 16 units per week, or if they binge drink on a weekly basis (at least 5 units in a single session). Men should receive a brief intervention if they consume at least 3 units of alcohol a day, 24 units per week, or 7 units in a single session.

Public health care clinics deliver brief interventions to identify the patient's high-risk alcohol consumption and to discuss ways to reduce their drinking.

The patient receives individual information about the negative effects of their level of alcohol consumption. The patient is also given oral and written instructions to motivate them to reduce their alcohol consumption.

One appointment usually takes 15–20 minutes. A couple of follow-up appointments are planned at the end of the first appointment. Laboratory tests can also be conducted in connection with the brief intervention. According to the Finnish National Care Guidelines, one in ten heavy drinkers return to low-risk drinking habits or quit drinking altogether after a brief intervention.

It has also been shown that the positive effects of the treatment last relatively long, at least one or two years. Preliminary research results also suggest that brief interventions decrease the mortality rate.



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The One Life health project strives towards a healthier Finland. The Finnish Brain Association, the Finnish Diabetes Association, the Filha Finnish Lung Health Association, the Organisation for Respiratory Health, the Finnish Association for Mental Health, the Finnish Heart Association, and the Cancer Society of Finland have teamed up to promote people's health and welfare throughout their lives. Duodecim participates in the project as an expert organisation.

## Costs:

One brief intervention costs around 84–241 euros. The Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa has around 280,000 heavy alcohol consumers. If all of them were to have brief interventions, the total costs would be at 67,480,000 euros at most.

## Savings:

If brief interventions were arranged for all heavy alcohol consumers living in the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa, the society would save 148 million euros in health care costs.

Please note: In the One Life living room debates, the costs and savings have been determined on the basis of an investment of 500,000 euros. 500,000 euros would cover around 2,000 brief interventions. This investment is estimated to save 600,000 euros even with the highest-costing option.

## Please note:

Brief interventions have been widely researched, and several reports and meta-analyses have shown them to be effective. However, it should be noted that the heavy drinkers who have participated in these brief intervention studies have mostly been men.

Brief interventions have been shown to be effective in reducing alcohol consumption among men.

Studies have not yet shown that brief interventions are equally effective for women.

Fewer women have participated in these studies, meaning that the connection between brief interventions and reduced alcohol consumption is yet to be proven.

Moreover, the research on the effect of brief interventions on the elderly or young adults still remains insufficient.

## Sources:

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