Alcohol Screening Tools for Women of Child-bearing Age

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Understanding Risky Drinking:

- 50% of women of child-bearing age use alcohol, and 15% of women who drink alcohol in this age group binge drink
- 1 of 20 pregnant women drank excessively before finding out they were pregnant
- 1 in 10 pregnant women have had a drink within 30 days

Women who consume alcohol during pregnancy increase their risk of having a baby with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). FASDs are 100% preventable if a woman abstains from alcohol use when she is pregnant or interested in becoming pregnant. Experts agree that all health care providers should learn how to screen and counsel women on alcohol use. There are several alcohol screening tools that you can use to identify risky drinking in women of child-bearing age including the TWEAK and CAGE questionnaires.

### SCREENING TOOLS TO IDENTIFY RISKY DRINKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWEAK</th>
<th>CAGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOLERANCE:</strong> How many drinks can you hold without falling asleep or passing out? (2 points if six drinks or more)</td>
<td>C: Have you felt the need to <strong>cut down</strong> on your drinking?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WORRIED:</strong> Have friends or relatives worried about your drinking? (2 points if yes)</td>
<td>A: Have you ever felt <strong>annoyed</strong> by someone criticizing your drinking?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EYE-OPENER:</strong> Do you sometimes take a drink in the morning when you first get up? (1 point if yes)</td>
<td>G: Have you ever felt bad or <strong>guilty</strong> about your drinking?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AMNESIA:</strong> Have friends or relatives told you about things you said or did while drinking that you could not remember? (1 point if yes)</td>
<td>E: Have you ever had an <strong>eye-opener</strong>—a drink the first thing in the morning to steady your nerves?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CUT DOWN:</strong> Do you sometimes feel the need to cut down on your drinking? (1 point if yes)</td>
<td>A yes to two or more of the questions denotes a need for further assessment.</td>
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An answer of 6 or greater to the Tolerance question **OR** a total score of 3 or more on the overall questionnaire denotes a need for further assessment.

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1. CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), United States, 2011-2013
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In addition to using TWEAK, CAGE or another alcohol screening tool with your patients, you can use the following script to further assess alcohol use.

**Assessment questions:**
1. In which situations do you drink alcohol?
2. When you’re out with friends, do you ever have a drink?
3. When you do drink, how often do you have 3 or more drinks?
4. What type of drink do you usually have? (beer, wine, liquor)
5. If you put your drink in a red solo cup, how full would the cup be?
6. Does anything make you want to have a drink? (i.e. hard day, angry at someone, etc.)

Once you complete your initial assessment, you can begin counseling patients that you believe are risky drinkers with these questions:

**Intervention:**
1. How do you feel about your alcohol intake?
2. Based on what we’ve discussed, can you see that your level of drinking is considered risky?
3. Risky drinking leads to poor decision-making since your guard is down. Poor decisions include getting into a car and driving, having unprotected sex, etc. Can you see that drinking alters normal thought process and leads to poor decisions? What are your thoughts about this?
4. Do you think you can change?
5. What type of changes do you believe would help you? Avoid certain circumstances? Substitute non-alcoholic beverages?
6. Would you like to discuss these changes at another visit in a few weeks?

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This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.

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