

Strategies for Change

Expect women to be on a continuum of readiness to change, ranging from complete readiness to ambivalence to refusal. The following are strategies that may assist women to make changes in their drinking:

Negotiate safer drinking amounts:

- Recommend drinking limits of no more than 7 drinks per week or 3 per occasion for women who are not pregnant and are not trying to become pregnant.
- Negotiate these limits as part of her change plan or as a contract between you and the patient.
- Recommend that pregnant women or women trying to get pregnant not drink any alcohol.

Provide strategies to help the patient make changes:

- Discuss places and people who encourage drinking and how to avoid them.
- Identify people in the patient's life who can support her; encourage the patient to ask them for help.
- Use patient education materials to inform partners, family, and significant friends about alcohol risks.
- Provide suggested language to help patients refuse offers of drinks.
- For women who are not pregnant and not trying to get pregnant, discuss effective contraceptive options.
- Restate your concern about the patient's health and, if she's pregnant, the baby's health.
- Reaffirm your willingness to help.
- Continue to monitor alcohol use.

