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Many Doctors Skip Alcohol Screening and Miss Patients’ Drinking Problems

Doctors miss drinking problems in almost three-fourths of patients because they don't conduct alcohol screening, a new study finds.

Instead, many doctors rely on gut feelings about whether a patient is engaging in problem drinking.

By asking a few questions about drinking habits, doctors can spot alcohol problems, and help patients cut back on drinking, experts told CNN.

Researchers asked almost 1,700 adults to complete questionnaires at the end of a primary care doctor's visit. Several questions addressed drinking habits, such as how often they drank, how many drinks they usually had per day, and if their drinking ever put them at risk of being hurt or causing an accident. After the visit, doctors were asked whether they thought the patient had problems with alcohol.

Doctors who relied on a hunch about whether the patient had a drinking problem, instead of conducting a screening, missed almost three-fourths of patients who screened positive for alcohol problems. Doctors who did suspect a drinking problem were usually correct, the study found.

The study appears in the *Annals of Family Medicine*.

Alcohol screening is recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, but is often not part of routine care, according to the CNN report.

Previous research has shown that screening and brief interventions by health care providers — asking patients about alcohol use and recommending they reduce risky drinking — can promote significant, lasting reductions in drinking levels and alcohol-related problems, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

To read more about the Signs and Symptoms of addiction, click here.