

The AUDIT assessment tool

There are many forms of excessive drinking that cause substantial risk or harm to the individual, and people drinking at these levels are frequently undiagnosed. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) is a screening instrument to detect excessive and harmful patterns of alcohol use. It has been developed by the World Health Organisation, particularly for use in primary care settings as a simple method of identifying who would benefit from reducing or ceasing drinking alcohol and to assist in brief assessment.

The AUDIT has been validated and used successfully in a number of different populations. It is designed to be administered by health care practitioners in a range of health settings, but does not require specific training and can also be self-administered or used by non-health professionals. The test uses a 10-item scale, takes 2-4 minutes to complete and is quick and simple to score. The test is in the public domain and so can be used without cost, though with acknowledgement of the source.

Guidelines for use of the screening test in primary care propose that all patients should be screened for alcohol use, ideally once a year. This can be done by administering the tool on its own, or by combining the AUDIT with other questions as part of a general health interview or medical history.

Scoring the AUDIT

Each question has a set of possible responses and each response has a score ranging from 0-4 (items 1 to 8 are scored on a 0-4 scale and items 9 and 10 are scored 0, 2, 4). Scores are added together and the total score can be compared with the cut-off scores provided to identify hazardous and harmful drinkers, and those with an established alcohol dependence. A cut-off score of 8 or more indicates a hazardous or harmful pattern of drinking. In addition to the total AUDIT score, a sub-total of 'dependence' can be calculated by adding the scores of **questions 4 to 6**. If this sub-total score is 4 or more, the patient is likely alcohol dependent and further assessment should be considered.

| AUDIT Score | Risk Level | Possible Intervention |
|-------------|--|--|
| 0 - 7 | Low Risk. | Intervention not required |
| 8 – 15 | Risky or hazardous level Moderate risk of harm | Brief intervention of simple advice – reinforce safe drinking behaviour |
| 16 - 19 | High-risk or harmful level | Brief Intervention, brief counselling and continued monitoring. Assessment & referral for more intensive intervention where necessary. |
| 20 or more | High-risk Dependence likely | Further assessment and more intensive intervention required. Consider referral to medical or specialist services for withdrawal |

For more information and to access the guidelines see the World Health Organisation website: http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/alcohol/en/index.html

Source:

Babor, T., Higgins-Biddle, J. Et al (2001) Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test: Guidelines for Use in Primary Care, 2nd edition. World Health Organisation, Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence.

Saunders J, Wutzke S. (1998) WHO Phase III Collaborative Study on Implementing and Supporting Intervention Strategies in Primary Health Care. Report on Strand 1: General Practitioners' Current Practices and Perceptions of Preventive Medicine and Intervention for Hazardous Alcohol Use. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, Alcohol, Drugs & Tobacco Programme