Identification of Substance Abuse in Women

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), along with the Office of Research on Minority Health, has released clinical protocol summaries to help with the identification and treatment of women who drink alcohol above recommended levels. The protocol consists of a comprehensive, 4-step process:

Step 1:

ASK ABOUT ALCOHOL USE

- Frequency
- Binge Use
- Tolerance
- Family Concerns

If consumption is > 7 drinks per week or > 3 per occasion

Step 2:

ASSESS FOR ALCOHOL-RELATED PROBLEMS

- Medical
- Behavioral
- Withdrawal
- Employment
- Accidents
- Legal
- Family concern

Step 3:

ADVISE APPROPRIATE ACTION

- Relate health problems to alcohol use
- Discuss risks during pregnancy
- Engage patient in the process
- Provide materials, such as “Personal Steps to a Healthy

Personal Steps to a Healthy
If **ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE**:  
- Advise to abstain  
- Refer to specialist  
- Offer additional resources

If **AT-RISK/PROBLEM**:  
- Advise to cut down  
- Establish drinking goal  
- Advise pregnant women to abstain  
- Offer additional resources

**Step 4:**  

*FOLLOW PATIENT PROGRESS*

For further information regarding identifying women at-risk for alcohol and other drug problems, please see "*Identification of At-Risk Drinking and Intervention with Women of Childbearing Age: A Guide for Primary-Care Providers,*" NIH Publication No. 99-4368.

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The Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project is funded in part by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD).