

Oregon BALANCE

Q: What's the purpose of Oregon BALANCE; why are you doing it?

A: Oregon BALANCE is a single interactive motivational interview that helps women evaluate possible risks in their drinking and contraceptive use. It supports them with their risk assessment, goal-setting and decision-making. The overall goal of Oregon BALANCE is to prevent the possibility of alcohol-affected pregnancies. The intervention allows women to examine at their binge drinking and sexual activity and gives them the tools and motivation to prevent alcohol-exposed pregnancies. We want women to come up with their own ways of reducing alcohol use and increasing their use of birth control.

Q: Why is it called BALANCE? Who developed it?

Oregon BALANCE was first developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as "Project: BALANCE (**B**irth Control and **AL**cohol **A**wareness: **N**egotiating **C**hoices **E**ffectively)". Oregon's version is funded by the CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

Q: What is Oregon BALANCE?

A: Oregon BALANCE is a free educational program for college women 18-24 years old, who are sexually active and drink alcohol. It is currently offered at the University of Oregon Health Services and Western Oregon University Student Health and Counseling Center. It involves one 75 minute interview and two short follow-ups to track any changes the woman has made in her drinking or birth control use. The goals of the program are to:

- Decrease "risky" drinking and increase effective birth control use so that women can avoid alcohol exposed pregnancy, which may result in a child born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).
- Women may also decrease their risks for unwanted sex, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, accidents and injury related to drinking.

The program is based on a researched harm reduction behavior change model that recommends effective contraception use or abstaining from sex and reduced levels of drinking or abstaining from drinking.

- A key component of the program is to inform women about their risk for an alcohol-exposed pregnancy and other alcohol-related health risks. It allows women a choice to change either their drinking or contraception use behaviors, or both.
- Changing either behavior decreases a woman's health risks, including alcohol-exposed pregnancy. Behavior change research shows that providing a woman a choice strengthens her resolve and commitment to make a change in risk-taking behaviors.

Q: How does a woman participate in the intervention? What does she get out of it?

A: A woman can fill out a self-screening survey, which can be obtained at the health centers on the UO and WOU campuses. If she wants to participate and receive personalized feedback about her risks for an alcohol-exposed pregnancy and other alcohol-related risk, she should include her name on the survey. She will be contacted by an interventionist who will set up a 75-minute appointment.

When she arrives at the appointment, she will receive:

- A **workbook** that guides her through a series of steps to look at her motivation for maintaining or changing either her drinking or contraception use and if needed, to develop a personal plan for change.
- **Support and resources** to make and maintain the change. The woman may contact a program educator at any time for additional assistance.

At program completion a woman will receive a \$25 Fred Meyer gift card.

Q: How are women encouraged to complete the 3-month program?

The program educator will follow up with each woman at two points, 1 month after the initial intervention with a phone call, and 2 months after the phone call with a short face-to-face meeting. Women who need additional support for change may contact a program educator at any time.

Success will be measured by whether she chooses to change her drinking or contraceptive use, and as a result, reduce her alcohol-related risks. Behavior

change research shows that acknowledging that a woman has a choice strengthens her resolve and commitment to make a change in risk taking behaviors.

Q: Are you collecting personal information about women participating in the program? If so, how will this information be protected?

A: Oregon BALANCE staff will gather data from participants that will be kept confidential and anonymous. The purpose of the data is to assess changes and to monitor the program implementation during the three months each person is in the program

- The data will be analyzed to determine whether or not women reduce their risk for alcohol-exposed pregnancy.
- The women's comments and suggestions will help us revise and improve the program to better meet women's needs.
- Only certain program staff will have access to individual women's personal data that will be secured in a pass code protected data base.
- Staff will provide the program funding agency, CDC, summary reports that include only group data with no individual personal identifiers

Q: Why aren't we promoting abstinence from drinking, especially for women younger than 21 years of age, the legal drinking age in Oregon?

A: The program informs women that underage drinking is illegal and advises that deciding not to drink is a wise decision to protect against alcohol-related risks.

However, research confirms that Oregon college women, including underage women, are drinking at dangerous levels, putting themselves at risk for a range of health, safety, legal, and social problems.

The college social environment facilitates drinking as a way to ease social connection. Students have ready access to alcohol and campus bars, restaurants, and alcohol advertisers strongly encourage students to drink, offering drinking specials and events.

The program will exclude women who:

- Are pregnant or trying to become pregnant;
- Are taking certain over-the-counter or prescription medications;
- Have a medical condition that can be made worse by drinking;

- Are recovering from alcohol or chemical dependence.

Depending on the situation, women who do not qualify for the program will be referred to a physician or for chemical dependency assessment and/or treatment.

Don't Open This Media Campaign

Q: What does the media campaign have to do with Oregon BALANCE?

The media campaign will alert both women and men on the UO and WOU campuses about the risks involved in drinking and sexual activity. In addition, women who want to participate in the intervention will be guided to the website, www.DontOpenThis.org

Q: How will women be targeted with the campaign message?

The FAS Program commissioned Metropolitan Group to test, create, and develop the Don't Open This message. Many focus groups were held with young women across the State. Several messages were developed as a result of the input from women. These messages were tested on the UO and WOU campuses. The Don't Open This concept was selected by women as the most memorable and most likely to attract their attention.

Q: What will be on the campaign website? How will that help?

A: The campaign website is designed to complement the media campaign materials. The website, www.DontOpenThis.org will guide women who are interested in participating in the intervention to more information. Women will also receive additional information regarding birth control and alcohol and drug treatment programs.

The purpose of the website is for women to be able to obtain detailed information about FAS, FASD, binge drinking, and contraceptive use.

Q: How will campus partners and health providers learn more about the program?

A: A separate campaign has been designed for campus partners on both campuses to assist women in making positive decisions about alcohol and contraceptive use. Partners on both campuses are planning events, such as speakers and discussion groups. In addition, they will be receiving media materials and information to give to women so they can make positive decisions about their drinking and sexual activity.

About the Target Audience

Q: Why are we targeting college women instead of women in communities experiencing health disparities?

A: Input gathered from County Public Health Department partners and other community advisory groups comprised of women's health care providers, along with statewide focus groups with Oregon women, and data from Oregon's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) indicated that women who were at highest risk for an alcohol-exposed pregnancy if they had some college education, were unmarried, and were white or Native American.

Alcohol and other drug screening is currently available for women in communities with health disparities who participate in WIC and Nutrition Programs, Maternity Case Management, and Healthy Start. Our research found that women in Oregon's University System receive fewer screening opportunities, and therefore, fewer opportunities to access alcohol and other drug prevention and treatment programs.

Although any woman who drinks may be at risk for an alcohol-exposed pregnancy, college women are increasingly binge drinking more often and at higher levels. Binge drinking for women is defined as drinking more than three drinks in a 2-hour period.

The Harvard School of Public Health 2001 National College Alcohol Study reports that:

- 40% of college women drank 4 or more drinks in a row in the previous two weeks. Among sorority and fraternity members. 80% at least 8 drinks in a week or at least 5 drinks in a day. Women students in their first year of college had a higher probability of adopting binge drinking than men.
- Despite flat national trends in overall binge drinking, there was a progressive rise in the number of binge drinkers at all women's schools between 1993 and 2001, increasing from about 24 to 32 percent.
- There was also a sharp increase in frequent binge drinkers (from about 5 percent to about 12 percent) at the five all-women's colleges in this survey.

Source: Department of Society, Human Development and Health, Harvard School of Public Health, "College Binge Drinking Rate 44 Percent Remains the Same Eight Years Running: Positive Trends Fail to Bring Down Binge Drinking Rate, According to Harvard College Alcohol Study" (online). Boston, MA: Harvard School of Public Health, January 13, 2005. Online at www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas

Q: Why are we only targeting women 18-24 years of age? Will younger or older women be excluded?

A: Women under 18 years of age would need a guardian's consent to participate in the program, which may be difficult to obtain. In addition, a key component of the program is to allow women a choice to change either their drinking or contraception use behaviors. In Oregon, it is illegal to drink under 18 years of age.

Older women, up to 45 years of age who express an interest in changing their behavior and qualify for the program will be allowed to participate as long as they are affiliated with our two participating Universities.

Q: Why are we focusing on birth control use rather than abstinence for young, unmarried women?

A: The program is specifically designed for at risk women, regardless of their marital status. Any woman who drinks, is sexually active, and does not use effective birth control is at risk for unintended pregnancy and an alcohol exposed pregnancy.

Research confirms that when college women drink, they often drink at levels that lower their inhibitions and good judgment. Under the influence of alcohol, women are more likely to have sex, fail to protect themselves from pregnancy, and may be vulnerable to unwanted sex or sexual assault.

The program advises women that deciding not to have sex is a wise decision and the most effective way to avoid alcohol-exposed pregnancy, unwanted sex and sexually transmitted infections.

Educating women about effective birth control and condom use gives women options to protect themselves and unborn children from serious health consequences associated with drinking during pregnancy.

Q: Why is this just for women? Shouldn't men behave responsibly, too?

A: Dangerous drinking is also a problem among male college students, as is the incidence of unsafe sex.

The purpose for the use of this project's federal funding is to change women's risk behaviors to prevent alcohol-exposed pregnancies.

- To focus our efforts on this goal, this program provides women with information and a behavior change intervention especially designed to meet their needs.
- The Don't Open This campaign may also prove to be effective for men, as well.
- The Oregon Public Health Division supports efforts to inform males about the issue of alcohol-exposed pregnancy and alcohol-related risks.

Q: Isn't this a waste of money since it targets such a small population group?

A: The student population of both UO and WOU is almost 22,000, combined. Over half of these students are women who are potential targets for the media campaign. In addition, all women are encouraged to stop by their health center and take the screening questionnaire. Thus far, of those women on campus who have decided to be screened for the intervention, 67% are eligible to participate which indicates they binge drink and are sexually active.

The project is considered a "Program Evaluation", or "Demonstration Project" by the CDC. The purpose is not to target all Oregonians, but to look at a small segment of the population to see if the intervention will work. Other States are doing a similar intervention with different target groups in hopes that the intervention will work with those groups as well.

Q: Don't college women get all this information from their school health services?

A: In focus groups with college women, they said that current college health education programs address the topics of drinking and sexual behaviors separately and on different occasions.

The **Oregon BALANCE** program is unique in that it,

- ties drinking and sexual behaviors together. It informs about the impact of drinking on women's choices and decisions that may result in serious pregnancy, health, safety, and social risks.
- encourages women to decide to change either their drinking or contraception use, or both, in order to reduce their risks. Acknowledging that a woman has a choice strengthens her resolve and commitment to make a change.

The school health services at both Universities offer complementary programs focusing on both alcohol and other drug use and birth control education. Oregon BALANCE interventionists work with both programs, making referrals to women seen in the BALANCE intervention.

Q: How is this program different from other birth control education or drinking prevention programs for college women?

A: A woman may not believe she has a drinking problem or she may hide it due to embarrassment or shame. The nonjudgmental approach of the program offers women an opportunity to explore and change her drinking at her own pace and in a private setting.

Other features of the program that may be beneficial to women are:

- Women who have limited transportation and/or live on campus may access the program without going to a clinic off campus.
- Women have the option of controlling their drinking problem on their own.
- Women have the option of deciding whether to change their drinking, birth control use, or both. Behavior change research shows that allowing women a choice strengthens her resolve and commitment to make a change.

For Colleagues, Agencies, and Other Professionals

Q: The program materials don't seem to focus strongly on FAS or FASD. Why is that?

A: In focus groups with college women, they said that they were not worried about having an alcohol-exposed pregnancy or about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

- Most women said they used a birth control method with which they were confident they were protected.

- Women did not express concern about their drinking, saying that all their friends drank the same way and that they would moderate their drinking once they completed college.
- Women did express concern about alcohol-related risks such as getting a sexually transmitted disease, unwanted sex, assault, and pregnancy scares.
- The program materials address these concerns and also inform about the dangers of unintended pregnancy while drinking, which may result in a child born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

Women recognized that when under the influence of alcohol, they might make bad decisions and engage in risky behaviors that could result in negative health, safety, and social consequences.

Q: “Don’t Open This” sounds like the FAS Program is endorsing drinking if women use condoms. Shouldn’t the program be discouraging this kind of behavior, i.e. drinking and sex?

A: In focus groups with college women, they said that when they drank alcohol, it often lead to unwanted or regrettable decisions about sexual activity. Women under the legal drinking age know that they should not be drinking, but many times aren’t aware of all the risks in doing so. While the Don’t Open This campaign acknowledges that women drink, the DontOpenThis website and the Oregon BALANCE intervention specifically address abstinence as a smarter choice, but allow women to arrive at that decision on their own.