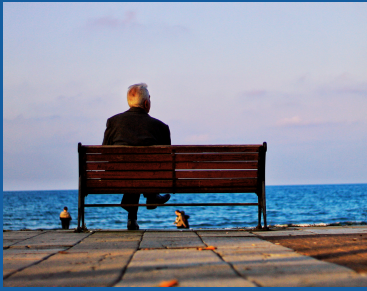


Alcohol Use and Misuse: Older Adults



The older adult population in the United States has been increasing, accompanied by a rise in alcohol consumption. This is concerning because as the body ages, its response to alcohol changes. It is important to learn the signs of alcohol misuse to prevent or treat alcohol use disorder. It is never too late to start making healthy changes.

Alcohol's Impact on Older Adults

Dangerous interactions with medications: mixing certain medications with alcohol can become harmful or even fatal, particularly with depressants like Valium and Xanax. This is especially concerning for older adults who may need to take medications daily. Examples include:

- Alcohol use can impact older adults by interacting with their medications and increasing their health problems.
- As people age, they develop an increased sensitivity to alcohol.
- An older adult's reliance on alcohol can come from using it as a coping mechanism.
- People at any age can develop alcohol use disorder.
- There are various ways to reduce or quit drinking alcohol.

- **Cold and allergy medicine (antihistamines):** when combined with alcohol it causes intense drowsiness.
- **High alcohol content medicines (such as certain cough syrups or laxatives):** when combined with alcohol will intensify alcohol's effects.
- **Acetaminophen (a common painkiller) :** when combined with alcohol may cause liver damage.
- **Aspirin:** when combined with alcohol, the risk of stomach or intestinal bleeding increases.
- **Medications for sleeping, pain, anxiety and depression:** when combined with alcohol can be deadly.

It is important to read labels, and consult with healthcare providers or pharmacists about potential interactions.

Increased Health Problems: there are certain health problems that are common in older adults. Older adults who drink heavily can worsen these health problems. Examples include:

- Alcohol may mask the signs of some medical conditions, complicating diagnosis and treatment. For example, it can dull the warning signs of a heart attack.
- Alcohol use in older adults can lead to confusion and forgetfulness, potentially leading to the misdiagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's.
- Alcohol use can increase the risk of immune system disorders, liver damage, brain damage and cancer.
- Alcohol use can contribute to the worsening of various health conditions, including memory loss, mood disorders, high blood pressure, ulcers, diabetes, osteoporosis and stroke.



Wheeler

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Increased Sensitivity to Alcohol: older adults, particularly women, are more likely to experience the impact of alcohol more rapidly than in their younger years. This can lead to dangerous situations such as:

- **Falls:** alcohol can impair balance, increasing the risk of injuries. This is concerning for older adults due to their bones being brittle, which make them more susceptible to fractures.
- **Car Accidents:** increased alcohol sensitivity can slow reaction time, impair coordination, and disrupt information processing, resulting in higher rates of accidents. This is especially concerning for older adults because they tend to sustain more severe injuries in car accidents.

Older Adult's Reliance on Alcohol

Older adults may develop a reliance on alcohol for various reasons.

Major life changes - such as new housing arrangements, declining health or the loss of a spouse - can lead to feelings of boredom, loneliness, anxiety, and depression which may result in alcohol misuse as a coping mechanism.

Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcohol use disorder is a pattern of drinking that harms a person's relationships, mental and physical health. Excessive drinking can lead to severe consequences, including health problems and injuries.

It is recommended that older adults either choose not to drink or minimize their daily alcohol intake.

Men should limit themselves to 2 drinks or fewer per day, and women 1 drink or fewer per day.

Learn Your Drinking Patterns and Plan Ahead

Evaluate your alcohol use - notice if you tend to drink more in certain settings or in response to your emotions. Learn your habits and plan for change.

- Develop a plan to combat the urge to drink.
- Learn how to say "no" when offered an alcoholic drink.
- Focus on staying healthy for the fun things in life, such as an upcoming vacation or holiday party.
- Develop interests that do not involve alcohol use.
- Avoid drinking when experiencing emotional distress.
- Avoid locations, people and situation that may be triggers.

Strategies to Cut Back or Quit Drinking

- Count the number of ounces in each drink.
- Keep track of the number of drinks consumed each day.
- Plan for days to be alcohol-free.
- Replace alcohol with alternative beverages, like juice or seltzer. Consider trying non-alcoholic "mocktails" and beers.
- Remove alcohol from the home.
- Seek support from family and consult healthcare providers for advice.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

Drug Free CT

www.drugfreect.org

2-1-1 of Connecticut

www.211ct.org or call 2-1-1

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

www.niaaa.nih.gov

