

Depression, Anxiety Top Reasons Older Adults Abuse Drugs or Alcohol



Depression and anxiety are the top reasons older adults abuse drugs or alcohol, according to a study by a Florida drug and alcohol treatment and recovery center. The study, conducted by the Hanley Center, found 63 percent of older adults blamed depression and anxiety for their substance use.

Thirty percent said economic and financial stress was to blame, while 20 percent cited retirement as contributing factors to dependency. Almost half of survey respondents named both prescription drugs and alcohol as their substance of choice.

"Older adults face a distinct set of changes and challenges as they enter their golden years," said Dr. Barbara Krantz, Medical Director of Hanley Center. "This transitional period of life is challenging, and may lead to difficulty in dealing with stressful situations, such as an early retirement or new financial strains, which in turn may lead to serious anxiety and depression. Without the proper tools to manage their emotions, baby boomers and seniors may turn to quick fixes such as alcohol and drugs, creating the perfect storm for dependency." Treatment admissions doubled in adults age 50 and over between 1992 and 2008, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Miami Herald reports that senior adult admissions in centers such as Hanley for prescription drug abuse have jumped 450 percent since 2000. Unintentional overdose is the second leading injury-related cause of death among seniors, the article notes.

The elderly often suffer from memory loss, mild cognitive impairment or Alzheimers, leading them to take too much medication, mix incompatible medications, or forget to take them. If they drink alcohol and take medication, the combination can be dangerous.

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