

Seniors and Alcohol



Growing older brings on many changes:

- Changes in Health, Lifestyle, Roles and Support
- Growing older often brings physical pain and loss of mobility
- Growing older can be stressful and loneliness is common

Alcohol and prescription drug problems, among adults 60 and older is one of the fastest growing health problems facing the country. Yet, the situation remains underestimated, underidentified, underdiagnosed, and undertreated.

Result: Thousands of older adults who need treatment and do not receive it.

Alcohol and drug problems among older adults is something few want to talk about, deal with, even treat! The reasons for this silence are varied:

- Health care providers tend to overlook alcohol or drug problems among older people, mistaking the symptoms for dementia, depression, or other problems common to older adults.
- Older adults are more likely to hide their alcohol or drug use and less likely to seek professional help.
- Many relatives of older individuals with substance use disorders, particularly their adult children, are living in denial or ashamed of the problem and choose not to address it.

The real issue – alcoholism and/or alcohol dependency – is overlooked and not treated properly and effectively.

FACT: 4 out of 5 seniors seeking treatment for substance abuse have problems with alcohol vs. other types of drugs

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For example, older men and women often experience feeling lonely after the death of a spouse. Grieving is normal but often it is accompanied by increased alcohol use. Many seniors rely on alcohol to reduce the feelings of loneliness, fear and anxiety associated with loss and other life stressors. Feeling **isolated** leads to increased drinking. If there are friends around who see their fellow senior using more alcohol, they tend to stay away. This only causes **more isolation** and **more heavy drinking**.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the American Geriatrics Society, people 65 or older are engaged in **risky drinking** if they consume more than seven alcoholic drinks per week or more than three drinks on a single day. It is highly recommended that the single-occasion drink limit should be no more than two drinks for men and one drink for women.

FACT: 9% of Medicare beneficiaries (age 65 and older) drink more than 30 drinks a month and more than 4 drinks in any one occasion.

Drinking at an older age can have additional negative effects, such as:

- Complicate treatment for medical conditions;
- Cause a range of medical problems associated with alcoholism
- Reduce the ability to function;
- Increase the risk of accidents or falling down;
- Negatively interact with prescription medications.

Prescription Drugs: People 65 and older consume more prescribed and over-the-counter medications than any other age group in the United States. Prescription drug misuse and abuse is prevalent among older adults not only because more drugs are prescribed to them but also because, as with alcohol, aging makes the body more vulnerable to drugs' effects. And, the use of alcohol with prescription medications brings added health risks.

Seniors may be alone, may feel lonely even around others, but they “**don’t have to go it alone.**” If you are concerned about your own use of alcohol or drugs, [Get Help](#). If you are concerned about a member of your family or friend, [For Family or Friends](#).

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Or [Find an Affiliate](#) near you.

NCADD Fact Sheet: [Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Among Older Adults](#)

WE MUST NOT FORGET OUR SENIORS. THERE IS HELP.