Older Adults and Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse in older adults is not always easy to see. Health care workers, family, and friends often do not notice the signs since they look like the changes that come with aging. For instance, the risk of falling goes up with both age and alcohol abuse. When an older person falls and bruises, it is often seen as an issue of aging. It may be harder to link the fall to alcohol abuse.

Many older adults view alcohol abuse as something shameful. They do not see it as a disease and do not see a need to seek help. Yet research has shown that older adults with drinking problems have one of the highest rates of success in treatment.

Did you know…

- Stressors such as loss of a job, death of a loved one, or changes in health may put you at risk for alcohol abuse.

- Alcohol can have a stronger effect on you as you get older. This is due to changes in your body as you age. Be aware that drinking the same amount as you did in younger years may have greater effects.

- Alcohol affects balance and reaction time. This increases your chances of falling.

- You should not mix alcohol with over-the-counter or prescription drugs. Talk with your health care team about your alcohol use. They can warn you about the problems of mixing alcohol and medicines.

- For older adults, one drink a day is thought of as “moderate” alcohol use. If you are over 65 years old, you should not drink more than one drink per day.
Are you concerned about your drinking?

☐ Do you drink to calm your nerves or forget your worries?

☐ Do you lie about how much you drink?

☐ Does drinking cause you to hurt yourself or others?

☐ Do you drink alone?

☐ Do you plan your day based on where and when you can get a drink?

☐ When you drink do you find yourself feeling angry, bitter or annoyed?

*If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should seek help.

**Getting Help**

- Admit that you have a problem with drinking.

- Tell someone who can help. This could be a family member, friend, your pastor or priest, or a doctor.

- If you feel you are in urgent danger because of your drinking, go to your local hospital.

- Contact free self-help programs.

**Alcoholics Anonymous** (AA) is a support group for people who have alcohol abuse problems. You can call in Madison at 608-222-8989 or look on the internet at www.aa.org.

Al-Anon is for family members of people with alcohol problems. Call them at 608-241-6644.

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**What is one drink?**

- 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits (80 proof)
- 5.5 ounces of wine
- 12 ounces of regular beer
More services can be found in the yellow pages of the phone book under alcoholism.

**Moving Forward**

- Find other activities to replace drinking. Care for a pet. Read. Take up a new hobby. Talk with friends. Volunteer.

- Work to prevent future alcohol abuse by choosing to go to places where alcohol is not a temptation.


**References**

