
If you want to limit your drinking...

Ask about medicines that could help you. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved several prescription medications for treating alcohol dependence.

Talk with a trained counselor who knows about alcohol problems in older adults. Locate individual, family or group therapy that works best for you. Find a support group for older adults with alcohol problems. Check out programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (www.aa.org) or SMART Recovery (www.smartrecovery.org).

Pay attention to how much you are drinking. **Keep track** to help you stay within your personal limit.

☀ **Drinking Guidelines for Healthy Older Adults**

- No more than 7 drinks a week
- No more than 3 drinks a day

Limits for women are generally lower than for men. Also, depending on your health and how alcohol affects you, it may be best for you to drink less or abstain completely.

☀ **Know how to count your drinks accurately.** A drink is

- a 12 ounce bottle/can of beer
- 8-9 ounces of malt liquor
- a 5 ounce glass of wine
- a 1.5 ounce shot of liquor/80 proof spirits

☀ **Sip slowly**, alternate with as many non-alcoholic beverages as possible. Have no more than one alcoholic drink per hour.

☀ **Don't drink on an empty stomach.** Having some food will help your digestive system absorb the alcohol more slowly.

☀ **"Water down" mixed drinks.** Try recipes for interesting nonalcoholic mixed drinks.

☀ **Find a comfortable way to say "no thanks"** or "I'll have a soda/water/juice instead".

☀ **Avoid situations** (people, places, circumstances) associated with excessive alcohol consumption.

Mixing alcohol and medicines can be dangerous

Many medications – prescription, over-the-counter, or herbal remedies – can interact with alcohol in very harmful ways, leading to increased illness, injury or death. Alcohol-medication interactions may be a factor in at least 25% of all emergency room admissions. Older adults are at particular risk for adverse consequences from mixing medications and alcohol; although persons 65 and older constitute only 12% of the population, they consume 25-30% of all prescription medications.

Mixing alcohol with certain medications can cause sleeplessness, nausea and vomiting, headaches, drowsiness, fainting, or loss of coordination. It can also put you at risk for internal bleeding, heart problems, and breathing difficulties, and make some health conditions worse. Alcohol can make the medications you take less effective and even useless, or make a medication harmful or toxic to your body.

Here are some examples of problems caused by mixing alcohol with some medications:

- ☀ if you take aspirin and drink alcohol, your risk of stomach or intestinal bleeding is increased.
- ☀ When combined with alcohol, cold and allergy medicines (antihistamines) can make you sleepy.
- ☀ Alcohol used with large doses of acetaminophen (a common painkiller) may cause liver damage.
- ☀ Some cough syrups and laxatives already have a high amount of alcohol in them.
- ☀ Alcohol used with some sleeping pills, pain pills, or anxiety or depression medicines can be deadly.



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Copies of this brochure are available at:
<http://ssw.unc.edu/AlcoholBrochure>



*To
Your
Health!*



As you get older ...

Physical changes associated with aging lower the body's tolerance for alcohol, and older adults can develop problems with alcohol even though their drinking habits have not changed. **It is important to understand how alcohol use may affect your health, safety, and mental function, and how you can take steps to lessen these effects even if you do not stop drinking.**

As we age, we metabolize (break down) alcohol more slowly and the alcohol stays in our bodies longer. The result is that just one drink can produce high blood alcohol concentration. Women are especially sensitive to the effects of alcohol because they have less water in their bodies with which to metabolize the alcohol.

HEALTH: Alcohol can worsen health conditions such as osteoporosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, and ulcers. It can also have dangerous side effects when taken with most medications, as shown on the next pages.

SAFETY: For older adults, even minimal alcohol use increases the risk for falls, household accidents, car crashes, fractures and other injuries. A large proportion of people who fracture a hip never return to the level they were at before their fracture. Alcohol is a factor in 40% of fatal motor vehicle crashes and fatal falls.

MENTAL FUNCTION: Alcohol can cause forgetfulness and confusion — symptoms which could be mistaken for signs of Alzheimer's disease. Even a small amount of alcohol can impair judgment, ability to process information, coordination, and reaction time.

Alcohol and prescription drug misuse affects as many as 17% of older Americans.

Almost 2.5 million older adults have problems related to alcohol, and these people experience more than half of all drug reactions leading to hospitalization.

Most people don't realize how very many medications are affected by alcohol. Below are some frequently used medications for common conditions that can cause adverse reactions when mixed with alcohol (generic name in parentheses).

☀ Ask about side effects from mixing medications with alcohol ☀

Allergies/Colds/Flu -- Alavert® (Loratadine); Allegra®, Allegra-D® (Fexofenadin); Benadryl® (Diphenhydramine); Clarinex® (Desloratadine); Claritin®, Claritin-D® (Loratadine); Dimetapp® Cold & Allergy (Brompheniramine); Sudafed® Cold & Allergy (Chlorpheniramine); Triaminic® Cold & Allergy (Chlorpheniramine); Tylenol® Allergy & Sinus (Chlorpheniramine); Tylenol® Cold & Flu (Chlorpheniramine); Zyrtec® (Cetirizine)

Angina (Chest Pain), Coronary Heart Disease – Isordil® (Isosorbide Nitroglycerin)

Anxiety, Epilepsy – Ativan® (Lorazepam); Klonopin® (Clonazepam); Librium® (Chlordiazepoxide); Paxil® (Paroxetine); Valium® (Diazepam); Xanax® (Alprazolam); Herbal preparation -- Kava Kava

Arthritis – Celebrex® (Celecoxib); Naprosyn® (Naproxen); Voltaren® (Diclofenac)

Blood Clots – Coumadin® (Warfarin)

Cough – Delsym® (Dextromethorpan); Robitussin Cough®; Robitussin A-C® (Guaifenesin + Codeine)

Depression – Anafranil® (Clomipramine); Celexa® (Citalopram); Desyrel® (Trazodone); Effexor® (Venlafaxine); Elavil® (Amitriptyline); Lexapro® (Escitalopram); Luvox® (Fluvoxamine); Norpramin® (Desipramine); Paxil® (Paroxetine); Prozac® (Fluoxetine); Serzone® (Nefazodone); Wellbutrin® (Bupropion); Zoloft® (Sertraline); Herbal preparation -- St. John's Wort

Diabetes – Glucophage® (Metformin); Micronase® (Glyburide); Orinase® (Tolbutamide)

Enlarged Prostate – Cardura® (Doxazosin); Flomax® (Tamsulosin); Hytrin® (Terazosin); Minipress® (Prazosin)

Heartburn, Indigestion, Sour Stomach – Axid® (Nizatidine); Relan® (Metoclopramide); Tagamet® (Cimetidine); Zantac® (Ranitidine)

High Blood Pressure – Accupril® (Quinapril); Capozide® (Hydrochlorothiazide); Cardura® (Doxazosin); Catapres® (Clonidine); Cozaar® (Losartan); Hytrin® (Terazosin); Lopressor® HCT (Hydrochlorothiazide); Lotensin® (Benzapril); Lotensin® (Benzapril); Minipress® (Prazosin); Vaseretic® (Enalapril)

High Cholesterol – Advicor® (Lovastatin + Niacin); Altacor® (Lovastatin); Crestor® (Rosuvastatin); Lipitor® (Atorvastatin); Mevacor® (Lovastatin); Niaspan® (Niacin); Pravahol® (Pravastatin); Pravigard® (Pravastatin + Aspirin); Vytorin® (Ezetimibe + Simvastatin); Zocor® (Simvastatin)

Infections – Acrodantin® (Nitrofurantoin); Flagyl® (Metronidazole); Grisactin® (Griseofulvin); Nizoral® (Ketocoazole); Nydravid® (Isoniazid); Seromycin® (Cycloserine); Tindamax® (Tinidazole)

Muscle Pain – Flexeril® (Cyclobenzaprine); Soma® (Carisoprodol)

Nausea, Motion Sickness – Antivert® (Meclizine); Atarax® (Hydroxyzine); Dramamine® (Dimenhydrinate); Phenergan® (Promethazine)

Pain (Headache, Muscle Ache, Minor Arthritis Pain), Fever, Inflammation – Advil® (Ibuprofen); Aleve® (Naproxen); Exedrin® (Aspirin, Acetaminophen); Motrin® (Ibuprofen); Tylenol® (Acetaminophen)

Seizures – Dilantin® (Phenytoin); Klonopin® (Clonazepam Phenobarbital)

Severe Pain from Injury, Postsurgical Care, Oral Surgery, Migraines – Darvocet-N® (Propoxyphene); Demerol® (Mepredine); Fiorinal® with Codeine (Butalbital + Codeine); Percocet® (Oxycodone); Vicodin® (Hydrocodone)

Sleep Problems – Ambien® (Zolpidem); Lunesta® (Eszopiclone); Prosom® (Estazolam); Restoril® (Temazepam); Somnex® (Diphenhydramine); Unisom® (Doxylamine); Herbal preparations – Chamomile, Valerian, Lavender

All information in this brochure is from research and other public sources – the National Institute on Aging (NIA), the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) SeniorHealth.
