

Aging, Medicines and Alcohol



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
www.samhsa.gov

**As you get older,
it's important to
take care of your
health.**



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As we age, the need to take more, and different kinds of medication tends to increase. Also, growing older means that our bodies respond differently to alcohol and to medication than when we were younger.

You should be aware that:

- Some of your medicines won't mix well with other medications, including over-the-counter medications and herbal remedies.
- Many medications do not mix well with alcohol.

Because medicine and alcohol misuse can happen unintentionally, it's important to know if you're having a problem.



Here are some signals that may indicate an alcohol or medication-related problem:

- Memory trouble after having a drink or taking medicine
- Loss of coordination (walking unsteadily, frequent falls)
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Unexplained bruises
- Being unsure of yourself
- Irritability, sadness, depression
- Unexplained chronic pain
- Changes in eating habits
- Wanting to stay alone a lot of the time
- Failing to bathe or keep clean
- Having trouble finishing sentences
- Having trouble concentrating
- Difficulty staying in touch with family or friends
- Lack of interest in usual activities

Do you think you may be having trouble with alcohol or medications? Do you want to avoid a problem? Here are some things you can do:

Talk to someone you trust:

- Talk with your doctor or other health care professional. They can check for any problems you may be having, and can discuss treatment options with you.
- Ask for advice from a staff member at a senior center or other program in which you participate.
- Share your concerns with a friend, family member or spiritual advisor.

Take steps on your own:

- Read the labels of your medications carefully and follow the directions.
- Look for pictures or statements on your prescriptions and pill bottles that tell you not to drink alcohol while taking the particular medicine. If you are taking medication for sleeping, pain, anxiety, or depression, it is unsafe to drink alcohol.
- If you have never been diagnosed with a drinking problem, one alcoholic drink a day is the recommended limit for anyone over the age of 65. That's 12 ounces of beer, 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits or 5 ounces of wine.



Share the right information with your health care professional:

- Make a list for your doctor of all your medications (including doses), especially on your first visit. Keep it updated, and carry it with you.
- Remind your doctor or pharmacist about any previous conditions that might affect your ability to take certain medicines, such as a stroke, hypertension, serious heart disease, liver problems or lung disease.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't know the meaning of a word, if instructions are unclear, or if you want more information.
- Whenever possible, have your doctor or a member of the medical staff give you written advice or instructions.

If you want to talk to a qualified care professional about alcohol and medications, a 24-hour hotline is available:

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

or visit

www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Check the box below to see if a local program or provider has listed its address and/or phone number.

For Health Care Professionals:

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This brochure was created to accompany the publication *Substance Abuse Among Older Adults*, #26 in CSAT's Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) series. The TIP series and its affiliated products are available free from SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI). Call 1-800-729-6686 or 1-800-487-4889 TDD (for the hearing impaired), or visit www.csat.samhsa.gov.

DHHS Publication No. [SMA] 02-3619

Printed 2001

